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THE THUMB OF KNOWLEDGE

IN LEGENDS OF FINN, SIGURD, AND TALIESIN

Studies in Celtic and French Literature

By
ROBERT D. SCOTT
University of Nebraska

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THE THUMB OF KNOWLEDGE

IN LEGENDS OF FINN, SIGURD, AND TALIESIN

By
ROBERT D. SCOTT

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Philosophy, Columbia University

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PREFACE

Some ten years ago, while bringing to a conclusion the first volume of a work on the Finn-saga—that group of tales the distorted reflections of which appear in James Macpherson's *Ossian,* I was confronted by the fact that some of the earliest stories belonging to this cycle contained episodes which found parallels in Norse and Welsh legends. This study, designed as an appendix to the first volume of the larger work, has grown to such proportions that it seems best to publish it separately.

It is a pleasure to thank those friends who in various ways have aided me in the preparation of this volume. To Dr. John L. Gerig, of Columbia University, I am greatly indebted for many suggestions and kindly encouragement. Dr. Louis H. Gray, likewise of Columbia University, has not only furnished valued advice and suggestions, but has given generously of his time and energy in connexion with editorial matters. Professor Edward Gwynn, of Trinity College, Dublin, kindly helped me with the editing and translating of the difficult *YBL* text. To Dr. Tom Peete Cross, of the University of Chicago, I am indebted for certain bibliographical data and for assistance in initial efforts to find my way about the complicated field of early Irish literature. I am also under obligation to Dr. C. W. von Sydow, of the University of Lund, who called my attention to an important foreign study which I had overlooked; to Professor R. S. Loomis, of Columbia University, for certain bibliographical data; to Professor P. H. Frye, of the University of Nebraska, for

assistance in editorial matters; and, finally, to Dr. L. A. Sherman, likewise of the University of Nebraska, who through many years has supplied aid and encouragement in more ways than I can mention. In conclusion, I wish to express my deepest appreciation of the courtesies extended by the officials of the National Library of Ireland; the Library of Trinity College, Dublin; the Library of the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin; and that of Columbia University.

R. D. S.

New York,
May, 1928.

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LL—The Book of Leinster, a manuscript preserved in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin. Cf. the lithographic reproduction of Joseph O'Longan's transcript published by the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, 1880.

LU—Lebor na h-Uidre (*Leabhar na h-Uidhri* 'The Book of the Dun [Cow]'), a manuscript preserved in the Library of the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin. Cf. the lithographic reproduction of Joseph O'Longan's transcript published by the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, 1870.

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INTRODUCTION

Of the many traditions which have grown up around, or have become attached to, the well-known Irish saga-hero Finn mac Cumaill, the Fingal of Macpherson's *Ossian,* none, perhaps, is of more interest to the investigator than that which concerns his celebrated power of divination. From the time of the most ancient saga-texts to the oral tradition of the present day, the notion has prevailed in both Ireland and Scotland that whenever Finn wished to foresee the future or to gain a knowledge of the unknown, he needed only to put his thumb or finger into his mouth or under his 'knowledge tooth' (*dét fiss*) to become possessed of that power.

It has long been known that this curious tradition regarding Finn has its counterpart in traditions relating to the Norse Sigurd as well as in those which concern the Welsh Taliesin. During the past fifty years a number of scholars have discussed these parallels and have advanced various conclusions respecting their relationships. There are, however, certain Irish stories, not hitherto noted in this connexion, which have a definite bearing upon questions of the origin and source of these similar Irish, Norse, and Welsh tales.

An inquiry respecting the origin of the strange legends concerning Finn's power of divination and a study of the relationship of the parallels to these legends in stories of Sigurd and Taliesin have a double value: primarily, they help to solve the problem of the historic

relations between the Irish and the Norse; and secondarily, they shed light upon the processes of story development in general as well as upon the genesis and growth of certain stories belonging to the Ossianic cycle in particular.

CHAPTER I
THE EPISODE OF THE THUMB OF KNOWLEDGE IN IRISH TRADITION BEFORE THE TENTH CENTURY

—

On the basis of such evidence as may be obtained from available Irish texts, an attempt to ascertain how far the ideas of Finn's power of divination were current in Irish tradition previous to the tenth century appears almost hopeless. There is, however, ample evidence to prove that the idea was current, at least in some degree. This evidence, for convenience in treatment, may be separated into two classes. The evidence which makes up the first class consists of certain statements found in very ancient texts and relating only to the nature of Finn's miraculous power and the means by which it is put into action. The most noteworthy stories in which such statements appear may be cited as follows:

(1) Stories Earlier than the Tenth Century Containing Statements which Bear upon the Nature of Finn's Power

(a) *The Death of Lomna.* In this story, preserved in *Cormac's Glossary* (late ninth or early tenth century),[1] Finn is depicted as using his divining power

[1] The text of *Cormac's Glossary,* either in complete or fragmentary form, is found in a number of different manuscripts. Concerning these manuscripts, their relationships, various editions and translations of the texts, etc., see Thurneysen, *Festschrift Ernst Windisch,* Leipzig, 1914, pp. 8 ff. For further information concerning editions, as well as for the probable date of *Cormac's Glossary,* see Thurneysen, *Königsage,* pp. 19 ff., and notes. See also Vendryes, *RC,* XXXVII (1917-19), 368 ff., and Meyer, *ZCP,* VIII (1912), 178.

in the identification of a headless corpse. A brief summary of the tale follows:[2]

> Lomna, Finn's fool, having discovered that one of Finn's wives or concubines was unfaithful, informed Finn of the fact. The woman in retaliation incited Coirpre, her lover, to kill Lomna. After the murder, Coirpre decapitated the corpse and carried the head away with him. Finn, returning to the hunting-bothy, found the body.
>
> "'A body here without a head!' says Finn. 'Make known to us,' say the Fiann, 'whose is the body.' Then Finn put his thumb into his mouth, and he chanted by *tenm láido* 'illumination of song,' and he said: 'Not . . . . . from Lomna's bed. This is Lomna's body,' says Finn. 'His enemies have taken the head from him.' . . . . . ."

The remainder of this story has no bearing upon the tradition of the thumb of knowledge.

(b) *Finn and the Phantoms.* In another text, which with considerable confidence may be assigned to the ninth century,[3] the divining power ascribed to

[2] The summary, including the quotation, is taken from Whitley Stokes's edition and translation of the Bodleian fragment of *Cormac's Glossary, Phil. Soc. Trans.,* 1891-94, pp. 149 ff., *s.v.* "Orc tréith."

[3] This tale, which, according to the late Kuno Meyer, *Fianaigecht,* p. xxiii, may be as old as the ninth century, is preserved in MS *Is. Vossii cod. lat. quart.* No. 7 of the University of Leiden. It has been edited and translated by Stern, *RC,* XIII (1892), 1 ff., from which this summary is made. The story recounted in this prose version is also the subject of a poem, preserved in the twelfth-century Book of Leinster, p. 206b, edited and translated by Stokes, *RC,* VII (1886), 289 ff. For that portion of the Irish text which relates to Finn's power, see *RC,* XIII, 7.

It might also be noted that in this same manuscript (*op. cit.,* p. 11) Finn, through putting his thumb under his *"ded-fis"* (knowledge tooth) and chanting a *"teinm laoga,"* is said to have prophesied the coming of the Son of Life to Ireland.

Finn is somewhat different in character.

> Finn and his companions once met a terrible giant. Having entered the giant's house, they were held prisoners and were mistreated in various ways by the giant and his supernatural associates. After the night's adventures, however, to the astonishment of Finn and his companions, both the house and the malign beings had disappeared. Furthermore, Finn's horse, which Finn and his companions had seen killed during the night, stood before them unharmed and tethered as they had left him. They held counsel among themselves in order to know who had perpetrated the outrage. Finn chanted through *"tenm (la)edhae"* and put his thumb under his *"dhed-fis"* (knowledge tooth). Then the thing was revealed to him. " 'Truly', said he, 'the three phantoms of Hibar-glend have done this in revenge for the death of their sister, Cuillend, whom we have killed.' "

In the first of the foregoing tales it will be noted that Finn, in order to identify the headless body, put his thumb into his mouth and chanted a *"tenm láido."* Thereupon follow several lines made up of words which, though translatable in most cases, are on the whole unintelligible. These lines, as in similar cases to be noted later, are suggestive of an incantation or a supernaturally induced utterance on the part of Finn, whose knowledge of the unknown seems to come from a conscious realization of what he has unconsciously uttered. According to the second story, Finn chanted a *"tenm (la)edhae"* and put his thumb under his tooth of knowledge. In this case there is nothing suggestive of an incantation in connexion with the operation. The tooth of knowledge is, however, a feature lacking in the tale of the death of Lomna.

(2) Stories Earlier than the Tenth Century Which Purport to Explain the Origin of Finn's Power

In addition to the stories treated above, there are certain tales, likewise found in very ancient texts, which not only show the nature of Finn's power and the means by which it is put into action, but also provide explanations for its origin. Several of these concern Finn's killing of a fairy man, Cúldub, but, since they are obviously only variants of the same tale, each version, for purposes of treatment, may be designated by the title of the manuscript in which it is preserved.

The Death of Cúldub (*H*.3.18). The earliest reference, as far as is known, to Finn's power of divination occurs in a text which in all probability may be dated as early as the ninth century, and which, indeed, may have been a product of the eighth.[4] The story in which this reference is found not only professes to explain the source of Finn's power, but is used as an example to explain the magical incantation *imbas forosna*.[5] A part of the tale, as translated by Meyer, may be quoted as follows:[6]

> "As did Finn ua Baiscne. When the fian were at Badamair on the brink of the Suir,

[4] For the Irish text and translation of this story, see Meyer, *RC*, XXV (1904), 344 ff. The tale is incorporated in a version of the *Senchas Mór* found in the sixteenth-century vellum MS, *H*.3.18, Trinity College, Dublin. Meyer states, *loc. cit.*, that, so far as he knows, the story has not been preserved elsewhere. For the probable date of the text, see Meyer, *Fianaigecht*, p. xviii. On the date of the manuscript, see D'Arbois, *Essai*, p. LXXII.

[5] This term, which is spelled in various ways, *imbas forosnai, imbass forosna, imbass for·ossna*, etc., will here be written *imbas forosna* throughout. For data concerning this incantation, see Chapter III, *infra*.

[6] *RC*, XXV (1904), 345 ff.

> Cúldub the son of Ua Birgge came out of the fairy-knoll on the plain of Femen (ut Scotti dicunt) and carried off their cooking from them. For three nights he did thus to them. The third time however Finn knew and went before him to the fairy-knoll on Femen. Finn laid hold of him as he went into the knoll, so that he fell yonder. When he withdrew his hand, a woman met him (?) coming out of the knoll with a dripping vessel in her hand, having just distributed drink, and she jammed the door against the knoll, and Finn squeezed his finger between the door and the post. Then he put his finger into his mouth. When he took it out again he began to chant, the *imbas* illumines him and he said [Here follows an untranslatable 'rhetoric'].'"[7]

This quotation constitutes about a third of the text edited by Meyer. The remainder of the text, apparently another story, concerns Finn's employment of his divining power in the identification of an enemy, a man in a tree. That portion of this second tale which bears upon the divining operation follows:[8]

> "Then his followers asked of Finn who he in the tree was, for they did not recognise him on account of the hood of disguise which he wore.
>
> "Then Finn put his thumb into his mouth. When he took it out again, his *imbas* illumines him and he chanted an incantation and said: [Here follows a "rhetoric" which Meyer does

[7] The Irish text of this "rhetoric" (Meyer's edition, *loc. cit.*) runs thus: "Tair Femen fuigial formuig meis mui muic cetson sirchrand sirlúath laith find sra [leg. fri] aulad Cúlduib chanmae."

[8] Meyer, *RC*, XXV (1904), 349. It may be stated that in the "rhetoric" which forms the end of this tale and which Meyer does not translate, the name "Dercc Corra" is mentioned. From this fact it would appear that Finn gained his conscious knowledge of the man's name through the incantation.

not translate] ''Tis Derg Corra son of Ua Daigre', said he, 'that is in the tree'."

The Death of Cúldub (*YBL*). This hitherto inedited text is preserved in the Yellow Book of Lecan, a manuscript of the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century. Another copy of the text is found in Stowe 992 (now *RIA, D.IV.2*),[9] a manuscript which may also be dated as early as the late fourteenth century.[10] The Stowe text, according to Meyer, may be considered a product of the ninth century.[11] An examination of the two versions, however, makes it appear highly probable that the Stowe text is either copied from the *YBL* text or is a less faithful reproduction of a common original.[12] Both may, therefore, be considered as old as

[9] See Best, *Bibl.*, p. 104, and Thurneysen, *Königsage*, p. 50.

[10] For the date of the Yellow Book of Lecan, see O'Curry, *Materials*, p. 190. Cf. *The Yellow Book of Lecan, RIA Facs.*, Introduction. For the date of Stowe 992, see Meyer, *RC*, VI (1883-5), 173. Cf. D'Arbois, *Essai*, p. XCIII, who holds that Stowe 992 is a manuscript of the fifteenth or sixteenth century. Thurneysen, *Königsage*, pp. 50 ff., assigns *RIA, D.IV.2* (Stowe 992) to an earlier date. There is reason to believe, however, that the manuscript is not older than the end of the fourteenth century.

[11] *Fianaigecht*, p. xix.

[12] The Stowe text has been edited and translated by Meyer, *RC*, XIV (1893), 245 ff. The *YBL* text, as edited below, is not only more exact but contains several sentences not found in Stowe. A casual examination of the two reveals the probable relationship between them. Although the spellings frequently disagree, the word order in the two texts, except for the sentences omitted in Stowe, is practically identical. One of these omitted sentences seems to be an error in copying. In two consecutive lines of the *YBL* text the expression *ina beolu* 'in his mouth' occurs. Stowe agrees almost word for word with *YBL* through the first *ina beolu*. It omits, however, what in the *YBL* text lies between the two occurrences of the expression, and is again in exact accord after the second occurrence. Compare the *YBL* text below (lines 24 and 25) with the Stowe text, *loc. cit.* The Stowe scribe, at the end of his text, remarks: *"Isam scithach"* ('I am tired'). Apparently, in copying, he wrote to the first *ina beolu*, then, glancing at his original,

the ninth century. They may be of even greater antiquity. The story preserved in *YBL* follows:

> Another time Finn was at Cind Cuirrig. It is there he was accustomed to be. A man was charged every morning with the cooking of a pig for his day's food. One time now Oisin was charged with its cooking. When he thought it time (i.e., it was done), it lay upon the litter beside him on the prongs of the fork in the hand of his companion. It is there that he had placed it. It makes off. He ran after it, across the Suir, that is, over Ath Nemthen, across Ord, across the Maing (?), over Fan hua Faelan into the summit of the fairy-knoll of Fer Femin. The door was shut after it had gone into the

misread the second occurrence of the expression for the first and, unconscious of his omission, copied on. Statements regarding the personal mood or feeling of the hard-working scribe, as in this case in Stowe, are not infrequent in Irish manuscripts. See the article by J. L. Gerig, *Modern Language Notes,* XXIII (1908), 264, and the note by Whitley Stokes, *Revue celtique,* IX (1888), 99-100.

The agreement of the word order in the two texts indicates that one was copied from the other, or that both were copied either from a common original, or from copies that go back to a common original. Although the *YBL* scribe may have copied the Stowe text, inserting the additional sentence on his own initiative, it appears more likely that the missing sentence in Stowe resulted from a copyist's blunder on the part of the tired Stowe scribe. It thus seems safe to assume that the Stowe text is either a copy of the *YBL* text, or, more probably, that they both come, either directly or indirectly, from a common original.

An edition of the *YBL* text follows [Brackets indicate parts of the text which have been supplied from Meyer's edition of Stowe, *loc. cit.* These parts are either illegible in *YBL* or are missing because of a hole in the manuscript]:

YELLOW BOOK OF LECAN, 212b, 3

Feacht *n*-aile d[o Fi]nd a cind cu
rraig. Isi*n*ti ba gn[athach som]. Rohearga (leg. roerbad?)
fer cac*h*a
maidni do fuine mu[icci dia cuit] lai do so*m*. Fec*h*t and
di*d*iu roerbad Oisi*n*e [dia fuine. Intan] ba mithig leis dos
rala forsan esa*i*r secha im belaib na gabla illai*m*

fairy-knoll. Oisin was left [outside]. When the *fian* awoke, he came [back]. "Where [is] the pig?" said Finn. "A braver man has taken it," said Oisin. Cailte undertakes it the next day. It was taken from him in the same way. He came [back] then. "Where [is] the pig?" said Finn. "I am not braver than he from whom it was taken yesterday," said Cailte. "Though I go myself to cook it," said Finn, "the young thorn is always sharper." He went himself to cook it, his spear-hafts in his left hand,

acheli. Is and arosiuir. Imsai ass. Soithi ass na di aid dar Siuir .i. for ath nemthen. Dar Ord dar í muí dar fan .h. Faela[i]n i mullach sith fer Femin. Iadthar in cóm
la iarna hesi iar teacht san sith. Fonacaib Oisine [imoig]. Intan
ron[d]uisig ind fiand isand ranic. Caidi in muc or Find. Rosfuc fer as calmu or Oisine. Gaibthe Cailte iarnamarach berar uad fon indus cetna. Ric side didiu.Caide in muc or Find. Nidam calmu innass o rucad ané or Cailte. Cia thi[a]sarsa dia fuine or Find as aithe cach n-delg ass ou. Luid side fesin dia fuine a crundu na laim cli ind laim ele oc impud na muici im belaib im na gabla arosisir. Dobeir Find forgum fair ni roacht acht fograinde in
gai didiu for a druim forfacaib in tairr didiu i maigib tarra in lethe i cill ichtair lethet intoib itoib muicce. Co ba secht roling darsin Siuir. Oslaic or se reme im mullach int sleibe. Oslaic or se tar fot int [s]lebe. Uinsi uaim ar Find. Dobeir forgom fair oc teacht isin sid coraimid a druim trid. Aroisir a laim
fris an ersaind corodruid in comla ara ordain cotard ina beolu. Asberat didiu alaile isde sin robai fis ac Find ar a ndechaid da mer is an sid ised nogebed ina beolu. Coclos an gol. Cid sin or cach. Culdub romarbad. Cia rosmarb. Find hua Baiscne. Guilid uili. Isand asbert som. Bind bind berlai bind bec nimgnae buiruid tairb coi cois techt fri Femen furlae. Mai muiced sond ar femen fugiath sirchrand sirluth laitho Find fri ulaid
Culdub. Berid a muic na ucht co d-a-raisseilb dia muintir. Fi[nit].

The word *Oslaic* of line 20, which is written above the line in *YBL*, and the words *Oslaic or se tar fot int slebe Uinsi* of line 21, as well as the sentence beginning *Asberat didiu* and ending with *ina beolu*, lines 24-25, are not found in Stowe.

the other hand turning the pig. On the prongs, moreover, of the fork he had fixed it.[13] Finn gave a blow upon him, but the point of his spear only reached his back. However, he left the belly in the Plains of the Belly, the shoulder blade (?) in Cill Ichtair, the breadth of the side in Toib Muicce. Seven times it jumped over the Suir. "Open," said he before him in the top of the hill. "Open," said he, [as he raced] along the length of the mountain. "[Take] this from me," said Finn. He gave it a blow as it was going into the fairy-knoll, so that he broke its back. He leaned his hand upon the door-post, so that the door was closed upon his thumb.[14] He put [it] into his mouth. Others say, therefore, that it was from this that there was knowledge to Finn, because as much of his finger as entered the *sid,* this it was that he put into his mouth. There was heard a wail. "What is that?" said everyone. "Culdub has been killed," said they. "Who killed him?" [said one]. "Finn hua Baiscne," [said another]. They all wail. It is then he said: "Bind bi*n*d berlai bi*n*d bec nimgnae buiruid ta*i*rb coi coiste*cht* fri Feme*n* furlae. Mai muiced so*n*d ar feme*n* fugiath sirchrand sirluth laitho Fi*n*d fri ulaid Culdub." He thereupon carries his pig in his bosom and showed it to his people. *Finit.*

The versions in H.3.18 and YBL. Although an intimate connexion between these two stories is at once apparent, an attempt to determine the exact relationship between them presents a number of vexing problems. It will at once be noted that the scene of the *H.*3.18 story (*H*) is Badamair, and that the action in

[13] Something evidently omitted at this point.
[14] In the Stowe text Finn is specifically named in this sentence.

the *YBL* version (*Y*)[15] takes place at "Cind Curraig." There is reason to believe, however, that the names "Badamair" and "Cind Curraig" were in early Irish tradition merely different names for the same place.[16] It then appears that, except for the episode relating to the woman in *H* and the speeches which immediately follow Finn's putting of his thumb into his mouth in *Y*, the two stories are fundamentally the same. It will be noted further that the fragment of "rhetoric" preserved at the end of *H* agrees almost word for word with a portion of that given at the end of *Y*, and that both "rhetorics" concern the killing of Cúldub. In the light of these facts it seems safe to assume that *H* is a

[15] As has been shown above, note 12, the text in Stowe 992 is probably either a copy of that in *YBL*, or both Stowe and *YBL* are copies of a common original of which *YBL* is the more faithful reproduction. The letter *Y* may thus stand for the *YBL* version, as well as for its textual source.

[16] According to a very ancient Irish story, edited and translated by Meyer, *RC*, XIV (1893), 241 ff., the warrior Currech Lifi killed Finn's paramour, Badamair. Finn, in revenge, cut off Currech's head and took it to the west, hence the place-name "Cind (or Cenn) Currig." In the *Acallam na Senórach* (*IT*, IV, i, line 7926), Cailte states that he brought Currech's head to the hill above "Badhamair." See also O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica*, II (1892), 262. From these statements it appears that Badamair was understood to be a strand, perhaps on the brink of the Suir River, and that "Cind Curraig" was a hill immediately above it. The teller of the tale probably knew that the names were associated in locality as they were in story.

"Badamair" is a name now lost. It was originally the name of a place near Cahir, County Tipperary. Dún Iascaig, a place mentioned in a part of the *H*.3.18 text not here quoted (*RC*, XXV [1904], 346 ff.), is now Cahir, County Tipperary. Sidh Fer Femen, the fairy-knoll mentioned in *H*, was supposed to be located in the plain of Femen, near Cahir. See Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum*, Dublin, 1910, *s.v.* "Badamair," "Cenn cuirrig," "Síd femin," "Síd fer feimin," etc.

These three tales, together with a number of other very ancient legends concerning Finn, are all localized about this neighborhood. The significance of this fact will be discussed in my volume on the early Ossianic Cycle now near completion.

condensed version—containing, however, an additional feature, viz., the episode relating to the woman—of the story preserved in *Y*. Several questions at once suggest themselves: (1) Did the scribe of *H* make a condensed version of the *Y* text, introducing on his own initiative the episode concerning the woman? The presence of Cúldub's full name, *ua Birgge*, which occurs in *H* but not in *Y*, makes it difficult to believe that *Y* was the sole source of the *H* text. (2) Did the composer of *Y* make an elaborated version of *H*, omitting, however, the feature which concerned the woman? The fact that neither the allusion to *imbas forosna* nor the episode relating to the woman, the most important feature of *H*, appears in *Y*, lays the validity of such a conclusion open to serious doubt.[17] The logical inference seems to be that both versions had a common source in an earlier tale which concerned the killing of Cúldub and which may be designated **X*.

The presence in *H*, however, of the episode concerning the fairy woman suggests at once a question as to whether this incident was included in **X*. Some light may be thrown upon the matter through the examination of a tale printed by O'Curry and also incorporated in Sir Samuel Ferguson's poem "The Death of Dermid."[18]

[17] It will likewise be noted that the "rhetoric" of *Y*, although identical in part, is much more extensive than that of *H*. Unless one may assume that the composer of *Y* created this additional "rhetoric" on his own initiative, the source of *Y* must be considered something other than the text of *H*.

[18] O'Curry, *Materials*, Re-issue 1878, p. 396. In presenting the summary of this story O'Curry states that the tale is preserved in the manuscript *H*.3.18, Trinity College, Dublin. Since he failed to give a more exact citation concerning the source of his story, it is impossible to state, without a minute examination of the manuscript, that his original was not the tale desig-

A short summary of O'Curry's story follows:

> Once upon a time Finn was hunting near *Sliabh na m-Ban* in the present County of Tipperary. As he was standing at a spring-well a strange woman suddenly appeared, filled a silver tankard at the spring, and walked away with it. Finn followed her until she came to the side of the hill. There a concealed door opened suddenly and she walked in. Finn attempted to follow her, but the door was slammed on his thumb. He put his thumb into his mouth to ease the pain and found himself possessed of the gift of foreseeing future events. This gift, however, was not, "we are told," always present, but only when "he bruised or chewed the thumb between his teeth."

Unless O'Curry has practically reconstructed the story, his source must be something other than the *H* version, cited above. The statements concerning *Sliabh na m-Ban,* the spring-well, and the bruising or chewing of the thumb are not present in *H*. It will

nated *H,* above. It is also impossible to determine whether O'Curry, with respect to details of the story and of the divining operation, followed the original text, whatever it might have been, or whether he supplied these details from modern tradition.

For Sir Samuel Ferguson's poem, see his *Lays of the Western Gael,* London, 1897, pp. 116 ff. Sir Samuel cites S. H. O'Grady's edition of *Toruigheacht Dhiarmuda agus Ghrainne, OS,* III (1855), as a translation of his source for the matter of the poem. Although the *Toruigheacht* may have been in a general way the basis of the poem, it does not contain this story about Finn's thumb; see O'Grady, *op. cit.,* p. 185. The origin of Sir Samuel's version of this episode is therefore apparently unknown. He may have borrowed the matter for this incident from O'Curry's summary, noted above. On the other hand, he may have taken it directly either from ancient manuscripts or from late oral tradition. At all events, it is not possible to state that Sir Samuel's episode regarding Finn and the fairy woman did not have its origin in the version of the Cúldub story in *H*.3.18.

also be noted that in O'Curry's story Finn's "thumb" is smashed in the door, while in the *H* text a "finger" is the injured member. It furthermore seems quite unlikely that O'Curry would have omitted reference to that part of the tale which concerns the killing of Cúldub, had the source of his tale been the *H* text. Yet, even though it might be proved that the story printed by O'Curry is one which he reconstructed from the *H* text, there still remains the possibility that there had been in existence a tradition which did not concern Cúldub, but did attribute Finn's smashed thumb to an adventure with a fairy woman, and that a portion of this story had been inserted in *H*.

Further examination of the *H* and *Y* texts reveals other significant facts. Although the *Y* version contains a number of details which are not preserved in *H*, the stories through Finn's killing of Cúldub are practically identical in the two versions. From this point to the end, however, they not only show a wide divergence, but both present irregularities and appear hurried and inconsistent. As has been indicated above, *H* may have had its source in an earlier story, **X*, which concerns the slaying of Cúldub, and which in all probability was either directly or indirectly the source of *Y*. Three explanations for the two differing versions may then be considered. First, **X* was a story which concerned the slaying of Cúldub. It contained the episode relating to the fairy woman and resembled *H* in fundamental details. The composer of *Y* omitted the episode which concerned the fairy woman and arranged the details respecting Cúldub in such a way as to account for the origin of the magic thumb. Second,

*X did not contain the episode relating to the fairy woman but was, in general details, similar to *Y*. The composer of *H*, following the general outline of *X, inserted the episode concerning the fairy woman, a part of another story bearing upon the origin of Finn's magic thumb, in place of the thumb-smashing incident as it is recorded in *Y*. Third, *X resembled neither *H* nor *Y* in that it contained no allusion to the tradition ot the thumb of knowledge or the thumb-smashing incident. It ended in a "rhetoric" which concerned the death of Cúldub and which probably followed a statement regarding the wails, similar to that preserved in *Y*. The two different versions of the thumb-smashing incident were then later insertions in *H* and *Y* respectively.

An attempt to establish with any degree of certainty the relationship between these stories seems more or less futile. There are, however, preserved in Irish texts a number of ancient tales which are very similar to the foregoing legends of Finn and which contain elements practically identical with those found in *H* and *Y*. The similarity of basic details in these stories not only suggests that the tales which form the group, including *H* and *Y*, are intimately related, but this suggested relationship within the group furnishes a tentative explanation for the development of *H* and *Y*.[19] One of these tales appears as an episode in the *Macgnímartha Finn,*

[19] This group of tales has been collected and studied by A. C. L. Brown, *Modern Philology,* XVIII (1920-21), 201 ff., 661 ff., who holds that the tales comprising the group are developments from a very ancient story, the basic elements of which concerned the death of a goblin at the hands of a hero. Brown also suggests the original goblin story as a possible source of the tradition relating to Perceval and the bleeding lance.

an extensive framework story, which in its present form may date from the twelfth century. There can be little doubt, however, that many of the tales incorporated in the *Macgnímartha Finn* may be assigned to a much earlier date.[20] A summary of the episode relating to Finn and the goblin follows:[21]

> 21. Finn had gone to Cethern, the son of Fintan, further to learn poetry with him. At that time there was a very beautiful maiden in the fairy-knoll of Bri Ele, and the men of Ireland were at feud about her. One man after another went to woo her. Every year at Hallowe'en the wooing used to take place, for at the time of Hallowe'en the fairy-knolls of Ireland were always open. Each man, however, who went to woo this maiden suffered a great injury, viz., one of his people was slain by an unknown assassin.
>
> 22. Now, Cethern, the poet, went to woo the maiden. His people went with him. As they approached the fairy-knoll, one of Cethern's followers, Oircbel, was slain, and it was not known who slew him.
>
> 23. Thereafter, Finn went to dwell with the champion, Fiacail mac Conchinn. To Fiacail, Finn made his complaint and told him how the man had been slain among them at the fairy-knoll. Fiacail told Finn to go and sit down be-

[20] The *Macgnímartha Finn* is preserved in the Bodleian Codex, Laud 610. Part of it was edited and translated by O'Donovan, *OS*, IV (1856), 281 ff., and again by David Comyn, *The Youthful Exploits of Finn*, Dublin, 1881. Concerning these two editions, see a letter by Meyer, *Academy*, XX (1881), 122. The complete text from Laud 610 has been edited in *RC*, V (1881-3), 195 ff., and translated in *Ériu*, I (1904), 180 ff., by Meyer. See *AfcL*, I (1900), 482, for Meyer's corrections. For the probable date of this text, see Meyer, *Fianaigecht*, p. xxviii.

[21] This summary is made from Meyer's translation, *Ériu*, I (1904), 187 ff.

tween the two strongholds which are between the two Paps of Anu.[22]

24. On Hallowe'en night Finn took a position at the place designated. The two fairy-knolls were opened around him, and he saw a great fire in each of the two strongholds. A voice from one of the fairy-knolls said: " 'Is your sweet food good?' 'Good, indeed!' said a voice in the other fairy-knoll. 'A question. Shall anything be taken from us to you?' 'If that be given to us, something will be given to you in return.' " A man thereupon came out of one of the fairy-knolls carrying a kneading-trough in his hand. On the kneading-trough there was food, which consisted of a pig, a cooked calf, and a bunch of wild garlic. As the man came past him, Finn made a cast with the spear of Fiacail mac Conchinn, saying: " 'If the spear should reach any one of us, may he escape(?) alive from it! I think this was a revenge for my comrade.' "

25. Soon afterward Finn heard a great lament and a great wail, saying:

" 'On the Barrow, by a sharp-pointed spear,
Aed, Fidga's son, has fallen:
By the spear of Fiacail, Codna's son,
Finn has slain him . . . .' "

Then Fiacail came and asked Finn whom he had slain. Finn replied that he did not know, but that he had made a cast with the spear and believed that it had reached someone. He further told Fiacail that he had heard a great wailing in the fairy-knoll, saying:

" 'Venom is this spear,
And venomous he whose it is,
Venomous whoever threw it,
Venom for him whom it laid low.' "

[22] Two mountains in the County Kerry.

26. Outside the fairy-knoll of Cruachan Brig Ele, Finn seized a woman in pledge for his spear. The woman promised that she would return the spear on condition that Finn release her. This Finn did, and the woman went into the knoll. As she entered the knoll, however, she said:

" 'Venom the spear,
And venom the hand that threw it!
If it is not cast out of the knoll,
A murrain will seize the land.' "

Thereupon the spear is thrown out, and Finn takes it with him to Fiacail. " 'Well,' said Fiacail, 'keep the spear with which thou hast done the famous deed.' "

27. After this Fiacail and Finn set out for Inver Colptha. Fiacail, fearing that Finn might not be able to keep pace with him, carried twelve balls of lead around his neck in order to restrain his vigour and swiftness. As they proceeded, Fiacail cast one ball after another from him. These balls Finn picked up and carried with him, and yet Fiacail's running was no swifter than Finn's.

28. That night they were at Inver Colptha, and Finn kept watch during the night. While he was watching, he heard a cry from the north, and, without waking the warrior, he went alone in the direction of the cry to Slieve Slanga. "While Finn was there, among the men of Ulster, at the hour of midnight, he overtook three women before him, at a green mound, with horns (?) of fairy-women. As they were wailing on that mound, they would all put their hands on the mound. Then the women flee into the fairy-mound before Finn. Finn caught one of the women as she was going into the fairy-knoll of Slanga, and snatched her brooch out of her cloak. The woman went after him, and be-

sought Finn to give her back the brooch of her cloak, and said it was not fit for her to go into the fairy-knoll with a blemish, and she promises a reward. . . ."

The *Macgnímartha Finn* breaks off at this point. Another story, preserved in the oldest part of the *Acallam na Senórach,*[23] concerns Finn's slaying of a fairy man as the latter is entering the door of a fairy-knoll. A summary of this tale, which relates to Finn's killing of the fairy man, Aillén mac Midhna, follows:[24]

> Every year on Hallowe'en, the goblin, Aillén mac Midhna, came to the stronghold of Tara and, after putting everyone to sleep through the music of his *timpán,* emitted from his mouth a blast of fire which burned the stronghold. On the day of Hallowe'en, Conn, the King of Ireland, asked that some of the men of Ireland volunteer to protect Tara against the ravages of Aillén. After the others had refused, Finn accepted the commission. Fiacha mac Congha, a friend of Finn's father, thereupon supplied the youthful Finn with a deadly spear "with which no devious cast was ever made."

[23] The *Acallam na Senórach* is preserved in no manuscript older than the fifteenth century. There is reason to believe, however, that the tale in its present form was in existence in the early part of the thirteenth century. It has been edited in part and translated by S. H. O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica,* I (1892), 94 ff., and II (1892), 101 ff. See also the complete edition by Whitley Stokes, *IT,* IV, i (1900), 1 ff., and notes, 272 ff. On the date of the story, see Thurneysen, *Königsage,* p. 48; Meyer, *Fianaigecht,* pp. xxviii and 47; Brown, *Modern Philology,* XVIII (1920-21), 205.

[24] This summary of the tale respecting Finn and Aillén is made from O'Grady's translation, *Silva Gadelica,* II (1892), 142 ff., revised according to Stokes, *IT,* IV, i (1900), 287 ff. A more complete outline of the legend appears in Brown's study, *Modern Philology,* XVIII (1920-21), 205 ff. In order to make clear certain arguments which follow, however, it seems well to include a somewhat condensed summary of the story in this investigation.

Finn then went out to defend the city. Soon he heard a plaintive strain of music, and he held the flat of the spear-head and its point to his forehead. After Aillén had put every one except Finn to sleep, he discharged from his mouth his blast of fire. Finn, however, warded off the blast with a fourfold mantle which he had been wearing, and thus saved the city.

Aillén thereupon returned to the fairy-knoll on the summit of *Sliabh Fuaid*. Finn followed him and, as Aillén passed in at the door of the knoll, delivered a cast of the spear that drove the goblin's heart out through his mouth. Finn then beheaded Aillén and carried his head back to Tara. Aillén's mother thereupon appeared outside the knoll and, calling upon the "she-leech of Amartha," raised a great lamentation, saying: " 'by Fiacha mac Congha's spear—by the fatal mantle and by the pointed javelin—Aillén mac Midhna is slain! Ochone! Aillén is fallen. . . . . .' "

An examination of certain passages included in a poem preserved in the well-known Book of Leinster makes it clear at once that versions of the foregoing stories concerning Finn's slaying of Aillén and Finn's slaying of Aed were known before the middle of the twelfth century. These passages from the poem ascribed to Gilla in Chomded may be quoted as follows:*

5

"In the eighth year of his life when he was visiting Dathi's Tara, he slew [Aillén] whose hand was full with candle, . . . with *timpán*.

* Meyer's edition and translation, *Fianaigecht*, pp. 46 ff. This poem is preserved only in a single copy, *LL* 143a-145a. Meyer assigns it to the twelfth century, *op. cit.*, p. xxviii.

6

"'A *timpán* for sleep!' said all, the practice at each Hallowe'en, a customary deed; every year, . . . the candle was burning brightly.

8

"For fear of sword-fierce Conn Finn went to learn noble poetry: Cethern Fintan's son, he was his tutor in poetic composition.

9

"After a feast the *fiana* bring Finn to avenge the poet Orcbél; the fairy-woman from Slieve Slánga had achieved the fierce bold deed.

10

"When he had joined the *fian* with worth, this was his journey on that night: . . . from Bri Éle, ...

13

"In revenge of the poet Orcbél Finn slew Ua Fidga at a feast in the west at the Paps, . . . with the spear of Fiaclach, Conchenn's son.

14

"Two staves Finn heard at the mound of the Paps above him: 'Stalwarth Ua Fidga has been slain' was the exact beginning of the first stave.

15

"'Venom is the spear' was the powerful beginning of the second stave,—I know it not; there after the deed of valour on bright All-hallowe'en he heard them.

16

"Seven deer by Slieve Bloom was Finn's first chase, . . . at the end of seven years crowned with honour, at the famous Apple tree of the *fiana*.

17

"A vessel full of gold, of glorious silver, the

woman out of Slieve Slánga gave to him; we know for certain that this was the first fair treasure which he took to the *fian* for noble distribution."

It is practically certain that Strophes 5 and 6 of Gilla in Chomded's twelfth-century poem are based on some version of the story concerning Finn and Aillén preserved in the *Acallam.* It appears equally certain that Strophes 8, 9, 13, 14, and 15 of the same poem are in like manner based on some recension of the tale respecting Finn and Aed contained in the *Macgnímartha Finn.* It will be noted that the episode preserved in the *Macgnímartha Finn* which concerns Finn's capture of the fairy woman and the return of his spear does not appear in Gilla in Chomded's poem. This fact, however, does not supply evidence sufficient to establish a conclusion that such an episode was not present in Gilla in Chomded's source. Altogether, it appears not unlikely that the story as preserved in the *Macgnímartha Finn* was in existence at least as early as the twelfth century.

Further evidence concerning the early existence of tales relating to Finn's employment of Fiacail's spear in the slaying of fairy men is supplied by a passage which, like Gilla in Chomded's poem, is contained in the twelfth-century Book of Leinster. This passage, which Meyer assigns to the tenth century, has been translated by him as follows:[36]

> "Aed MacFidaig fell by the hand of Find,
> From the spear of Fiacail Mac Conchenn,
> For the love he gave to the maiden of Brí Eile.

[36] D. MacInnes and A. Nutt, *Folk and Hero Tales,* London, 1890, p. 405. Cf. Brown, *Modern Philology,* XVIII (1920-21), 203, note 2; Meyer, *RC,* XIV (1893), 249. On the date and for the Irish text, see Meyer, *Fianaigecht,* p. xxiii.

By the same spear Find killed
Culdub Mac Fidga Forfind."[27]

The allusion to the maiden of Bri Éile makes it clear that the first three lines of this passage refer to the incident preserved in the *Macgnímartha Finn*.[28] The identity of "Culdub Mac Fidga" is not clear.

In addition to the foregoing stories relating to Finn, another tale, *Móin Gai Glaiss*, which may be as old as the twelfth century, or possibly an earlier date, demands attention.[29] A translation by Stokes, *RC*, XV (1894), 305 ff., may be quoted as follows:

> "Gae Glas son of Luinde son of Lug Liamna was Fiacha Srabtine's champion. 'Tis for him that the smith made the intractable spear. From the south Cúldub son of Dían went on the day of *samain* (Nov. 1) to seek to slay some one, and he slew Fidrad son of Dam Dub, from whom *Ard Fidraid* is called. Then Gae Glas went a-following him and hurled at him the lance which the smith had made for him by magic, and it passed through Cúldub into the bog, and that lance was never found afterwards save once, when Mael-Odrán son of Dimma Cron, after he [leg. it ?] had been a year in the

[27] According to the *LL* text the place-name is *"Breg Éile."* In *RC*, XIV (1893), 249, Meyer translates the last line quoted above thus: "Culdub the son of Fidga the very fair."

[28] Allusions to Aed mac Fidaig also appear in the *Acallam na Senórach* (Stokes, *IT*, IV, i, lines 1047 and 3116) and in Broccán Cráibdech's tenth-century poem (*LL* 43b, 28), where he is cited as a famous hero. See Meyer, *Fianaigecht*, p. xxiii, note 1, and *Ériu*, I (1904), 188, note 4.

[29] This tale, entitled *Móin Gai Glaiss* (*Moin Gai Glais*), is recounted in both the prose and the verse *Dindshenchas*. The prose version has been edited and translated by Stokes, *RC*, XV (1894), 305 ff., and the verse version, by Edward Gwynn, *The Metrical Dindshenchas*, Part II, *RIA, TLS*, IX (1906), 64 ff. On the date, see Thurneysen, *Königsage*, pp. 36 ff.; Stokes, *RC*, XV (1894), 272; Brown, *Modern Philology*, XVIII (1920-21), 203.

ground, found it and slew therewith Aithechdae king of Húi Máil. Whereof he sang this stave: *Imlech Ech,* etc.

"This lance was the *Carr* of Belach Duirgen: 'tis it that would slay the thirty bands. Thus it was, with a fork under its neck, and none save the Devil would move it. So long as the lance is with its point southwards the strength of Conn's Half (the North of Ireland) will not be broken by Leinster."

As Brown has pointed out, there are a number of details, common to this story of Gae Glas and to the stories of Finn cited above, which deserve consideration. First, Gae Glas slew Cúldub son of Dían with the cast of a spear in revenge for a wrong, just as Finn slew Cúldub in the tales previously cited. Again, in the story of Gae Glas and in the story of Finn and Aillén the spear is a magic weapon. It may further be noted that in the tale of Finn and Aed, as well as in the incident reflected in the passage quoted from the anonymous tenth-century poem relating to Finn's slaying of "Culdub Mac Fidga," the spear is apparently the same magic weapon with which Aillén mac Midhna was slain. Furthermore, in the story concerning Gae Glas, as well as in those relating to Aillén and to Aed, the deed was done on Hallowe'en. Finally, in the tale of Gae Glas, a personage called Fiacha Srabtine appears as the patron of the hero, while in the story of Aillén and in that of Aed, a character by the name of Fiacha mac Congha or Fiacail mac Conchinn (Conchenn) plays a similar part. In his discussion of these details, Brown holds that the similarity of names and rôles played in these stories "can hardly be fortuitous," and concludes that the tale of Gae Glas is a variant of

"Finn and the Goblin," the essential elements of which are the slaying of a supernatural foe and the accomplishment of this deed through the use of a magic spear.

An examination of the details preserved in the foregoing stories not only justifies with reasonable certainty an assertion that the tales are closely related, but hints at what may have been the nature of certain relationships existing between them. In all of the stories a goblin has in some way inflicted injury upon the hero or upon the friends of the hero. In all of these stories the hero slays this goblin through the cast of a spear. In all of the stories except the *H* and *Y* versions of those relating to Finn and Cúldub, the spear which Finn casts is a magic weapon. It will further be noted that in all of the stories except that which concerns Gae Glas, Finn is definitely named as the hero. In this latter tale the presence of the name Fiacha, which also occurs in the story of Aed and in that of Aillén, and the appearance of the name Cúldub, which is also found in the several tales of Finn and this goblin, lend support to Brown's suggestion that the tale relating to Gae Glas is a variant of a primary story of "Finn and the Goblin," according to which Finn by means of a magic spear slays a supernatural foe. There seems to be a possibility, however, that this basic story, "Finn and the Goblin," was in turn a development from an earlier tale, the fundamental elements of which concerned the death of a goblin through the medium of a magic spear hurled by some hero. This hero may have been some one other than Finn; and we may then suppose that such an hypothetical basic tale relating to the death of a goblin at the hands of a

hero, which tale may be designated *A, was the source of the story in which Gae Glas was named as the hero, as well as of another development, the primary tale of "Finn and the Goblin," in which Finn takes the hero's rôle.

In the stories of Finn and Aillén, Finn and Aed, and Finn and Cúldub, all of which may be developments from the primary "Finn and the Goblin," the occurrence of certain similar details furnishes ground for further conjecture concerning their relationships. In each of these Finn kills a goblin who has in some way injured either him or his friends. In each of the tales the slaying takes place at the door of a fairy-knoll. In the story relating to Aillén and in that relating to Aed the slaying is done with a magic weapon, the spear of Fiacha mac Congha or Fiacail mac Conchinn. In each of the tales a lament uttered by a fairy or by several fairies follows the killing, and, in each of the stories except the Y version of the tale respecting Finn and Cúldub, a fairy woman appears. These facts suggest a conclusion, indicated above, that all the foregoing tales relating to Finn are developments from a primary story, hereinafter designated *B^2, the essential details of which would seem to have been as follows:

> A goblin has injured either Finn or Finn's friends. On Hallowe'en, Finn, by means of a spear, perhaps the magic weapon of Fiacha mac Congha (Fiacail mac Conchinn), slays the goblin as the latter is entering the door of a fairy-knoll. A lament is uttered by the fairies, and a fairy woman appears with whom Finn does or does not have a meeting.

From such an hypothetical tale (*B^2) the stories of Finn and Aillén (C^1), Finn and Aed, Finn and Cúldub,

as well as the story of Gae Glas (B^1), may be developments.

The tale of Finn and Aed and those of Finn and Cúldub, however, have further points in common. According to the stories of Finn and Cúldub, the goblin has stolen a pig which members of the *fian* were cooking. In the tale of Finn and Aed, although Finn is seeking to revenge the death of the poet Oircbel, the goblin whom Finn slew was engaged in carrying food, which included a cooked pig, at the time of the slaying. Again, in the story of Finn and Aed and in the *Y* version of Finn and Cúldub, after the slaying of Cúldub loud wails interspersed with cries concerning the name of the slayer arise within the *sidh*. Furthermore, in the story of Finn and Aed and in the *H* version of Finn and Cúldub, a fairy woman appears with whom Finn has a meeting. The presence of these details, common to the stories of Finn and Aed and of Finn and Cúldub, points toward an earlier tale ($*C^2$), in which the story of Finn and Aed and those of Finn and Cúldub had a common source. Such a tale, apparently a development from the primary $*B^2$, may not then be considered the source of the story relating to Finn and Aillén. This hypothetical story ($*C^2$) may be outlined as follows:

> A goblin which had heretofore injured Finn or Finn's friends stole a pig which members of the *fian* were cooking. Finn followed the goblin and with the cast of a spear, perhaps a magic weapon, killed him as the goblin was entering the door of a fairy-knoll. Wails interspersed with cries concerning the name of the slayer arose within the *sidh*. A fairy woman thereupon appeared with whom Finn had a meeting.

If the existence of such an hypothetical tale as this ($*C^2$) may be assumed, a possible explanation of the story relating to Finn and Aed (D^1) appears, viz., that it is a literary treatment of some tale developed from the hypothetical $*C^2$. The assumption of such an hypothetical story ($*C^2$) also furnishes a possible explanation for the origin and nature of the *H* and *Y* versions of the tale which concerns Finn and Cúldub.

As has been pointed out above, there are reasons which make it appear that *H* is not a development from *Y*, and that, although *Y* may possibly have been evolved from *H*, both *H* and *Y* have their origins in a common source, $*X$. In *H*, it will be recalled, Finn's finger is smashed as a result of a meeting with a fairy woman. In *Y* the fairy woman does not appear. The fact, however, that the episode of the smashed thumb or finger appears in both *H* and *Y* prompts the inference that this feature was present in $*X$, the common source of *H* and *Y*. But what of the detail relating to Finn's pursuit of the fairy woman, which is found in *H*, but not in *Y*? Was this incident a part of $*X$?

That the stories concerning Gae Glas, Finn and Aillén, Finn and Aed, and Finn and Cúldub are intimately related, there can be no doubt. The similarity of names and features included in them is too close to make plausible any other conclusion. In the story of Finn and Aillén, in that of Finn and Aed, and in the *H* version of the tale concerning Finn and Cúldub, however, a fairy woman appears. Unless it might be assumed that the tale of Finn and Aed and that of Finn and Aillén are developments from *H*—an assumption which would necessitate an explanation for the omission of

the thumb-smashing incident from these two stories, as well as for the presence in them of the allusions to the magic spear of Fiacail mac Conchinn—it appears safe to conjecture that an episode relating to a fairy woman was present in the common source of the stories respecting Finn and Aed, Finn and Aillén, and Finn and Cúldub, and that an incident relating to a fairy woman was also present in *X. Upon the basis of these assumptions, *X may then be explained as a direct development from the hypothetical tale *C^a. In the development of *X, however, it appears that the composer, ignoring that part of his source which concerned a previous enmity between Finn and Cúldub, and possibly omitting an allusion to the spear of Fiacail mac Conchinn, began his narrative with the stealing of the pig and the killing of the goblin. Having followed his source through the slaying of Cúldub and the lamentation of the fairies, he modified the episode concerning the fairy woman which existed in his source by substituting the incident relating to the fairy woman and the smashed thumb or finger—a creation of his own designed to account for the tradition respecting Finn's power of divination. In keeping with this idea of explaining Finn's power, he blended certain parts of the fairies' lamentation with certain phrases of his own invention and made the whole an utterance on the part of Finn designed to serve as an incantation. Then *H* might be considered a condensed version of *X in which the composer, desiring to explain *imbas forosna* —a term which he knew to be the name of a form of divination in some way connected with Finn's act—had incorporated the allusion to this magic practice. It, furthermore, appears not improbable that the composer

of *H* was none other than the commentator on the version of the *Ancient Laws* in *H*.3.18. Accordingly, *Y* may be explained as a modified form of **X* in which the composer, having greatly elaborated certain features of his source, omitted the detail concerning the fairy woman. In conformity with the foregoing explanation, the story outlined by O'Curry may be explained as a comparatively late tale developed with certain modifications from that portion of **X* or of *H* which follows the slaying of Cúldub.

Based on the preceding facts and conjectures, a tentative explanation of the relationships between these tales of Finn may be presented in the following outline:

**A*

A goblin has in some way injured a hero or the friends of a hero. The hero through the cast of a magic spear kills the goblin.

B[1]

(*Móin Gai Glaiss*)
On Hallowe'en, Cúldub went forth and slew Fidrad. Gae Glas, the champion of Fiacha Srabtine, pursued Cúldub and with the cast of a magic spear killed him.[30]

**B*[1]

A goblin has injured Finn or Finn's friends. On Hallowe'en, as the goblin is entering the door of a fairy-knoll, Finn slays him through the cast of a magic spear, perhaps the spear of Fiacail mac Conchinn. A lament on the part of the fairies arises, and a fairy woman appears with whom Finn

[30] As has been indicated above, the presence of the names Cúldub and Fiacha makes any attempt to explain the origin of this tale, *B*[1], extremely hazardous. It may even be a development from **A* which has been influenced by tales similar to *C*[1], *D*[1] or **X*.

may or may not have a meeting.

C[1]

(*Finn and Aillén*)

Aillén mac Midhna had burned Tara a number of times. One Hallowe'en, Finn not only frustrated Aillén's attempt to burn the city but, with a cast of Fiacail mac Conchinn's spear, killed the goblin as the latter was entering the fairy-knoll. Aillén's mother thereupon appeared and gave voice to great lamentations.

**C*[2]

A goblin had injured Finn or Finn's friends. On Hallowe'en, the goblin stole a pig which members of the *fian* were cooking. Finn pursued the goblin and with the cast of a spear, perhaps the magic weapon of Fiacail mac Conchinn, slew the goblin as the latter was entering a fairy-knoll. A great lamentation interspersed with cries concerning the name of the slayer arose within the knoll. A fairy woman thereupon appeared with whom Finn had a meeting.

D[1]

(*Finn and Aed*)

On Hallowe'en, Finn went to the fairy-knoll in order to avenge the death of Oircbel, the poet, who had been slain by the fairy people. During the night, Aed mac Fidaig, a fairy man, appeared between the two knolls carrying food, which included a cooked pig. Finn

**X*

(Possible Source of *H* and *Y*)

Once upon a time the members of the *fian* were engaged in cooking a pig. Cúldub ua Birgge stole the pig. Finn pursued and killed Cúldub with a spear (apparently not the magic weapon of Fiacail) while the goblin was entering a fairy-knoll. Lam-

with the magic spear of Fiacail mac Conchinn slew Aed as the latter was entering one of the knolls. A loud lamentation interspersed with cries concerning the name of the slayer arose within the knoll. A woman thereupon appeared. Finn captured this woman but later released her upon her promise to return the spear.

entations interspersed with cries regarding the name of the slayer arose within the knoll. A fairy woman thereupon appeared carrying a dripping vessel in her hand. Finn followed the woman and *extended his hand so that it entered the doorway of the knoll. The woman immediately slammed the door upon Finn's thumb. Finn, in order to ease the pain, inserted his thumb in his mouth and repeated an incantation* (made up in part of words belonging to the lamentation of the fairies).

Z

(*O'Curry's Story*)

(A comparatively modern and elaborated rendering of that part of **X* or *H* which follows the slaying of Cúldub.)

H

(*Finn and Cúldub*)

(Practically identical with **X* except that the lamentation of the fairies is omitted, and the composer has inserted the allusion to *imbas forosna* as the name of Finn's divining power.)

Y

(*Finn and Cúldub*)

(An elaborated version of **X* in which the detail regarding the fairy woman

has been omitted. The composer, however, retained the episode of the smashed thumb as a detail in connexion with the pursuit of Cúldub. The extensive "rhetoric" of this version may have been present in *X. In such a case it may be assumed that part of it was omitted by the composer of H. On the other hand, it is possible that those parts of the "rhetoric" which appear in this version and which are not preserved in H are creations by the composer of Y.)

Although this tentative explanation of the relationships between the foregoing tales of Finn seems to have a more or less logical foundation in the known facts, certain considerations in connexion with the stories cited tend to cast some doubt upon the validity of the hypothesis. First, the presence of the names Cúldub and Fiacha in the story of Gae Glas (B^1) raises a question as to whether this tale did not have its origin in some source other than that indicated in the outline. Again, the fact that in neither version of the tale relating to Finn and Cúldub is there any allusion to a magic spear or to the illustrious Fiacail or Fiacha, calls forth a doubt regarding the postulated relationship of these stories concerning Cúldub to those of Finn and Aed and of Finn and Aillén, as presented in the foregoing explanation. Furthermore, the story of Finn and Cúl-

dub, built up as it is about the episode relating to the goblin's stealing of a cooked pig, seems to be constructed of matter more primitive than that included in the tale of Finn and Aillén or that of Finn and Aed. In other words, there seems to be a possibility that the tale of Finn and Aillén and that of Finn and Aed are literary works of composers who, having a knowledge of much primitive lore that included the story of Finn and Cúldub, not only created new features, but in the composition of their works drew upon and fitted together various details from the mass of stories which they knew. Finally, the existence of such a tale as that printed by O'Curry, when added to the fact that the detail regarding the fairy woman is not preserved in *Y*, suggests that a story which concerned Finn's smashing his thumb or finger as the result of a meeting with a fairy woman may have existed as an independent tale, later blended with the story relating to Finn's killing of Cúldub.

On the basis of these considerations, a second hypothesis regarding the relationships between the stories cited above may be proposed. According to this theory it may be assumed that in very early times there was in existence a story (**A*) the fundamental elements of which concerned a hero's killing of a goblin through the medium of a magic spear. As Brown has suggested, this *motif* may be in some way related to the story regarding Perceval and the bleeding lance. From this tale (**A*) it may further be assumed that there developed a story in which Finn was named as the hero and Cúldub was given as the name for the goblin. This tale, which will be designated **B*, may be outlined as follows:

> Once when certain members of the *fian* were at Cind Cuirrig, they were engaged in cooking a pig. Cúldub ua Birgge stole the pig from them. Finn pursued Cúldub and slew him as the goblin was entering the door of a fairy-knoll on the plain of Femen. A great lamentation interspersed with cries concerning the name of the slayer as well as the name of Cúldub arose within the knoll. Finn, thereupon, took the pig, which the goblin had dropped at the door of the knoll, and returned to his people.

As will be noted, this hypothetical story does not retain the detail regarding the magic spear postulated as one of the elements in the legend from which this tale is a development, nor does it contain any allusion to the fairy woman who appears in *H* or to the thumb-smashing incident preserved in both *H* and *Y*.

This second hypothesis further assumes the existence of a very early story (**O*), similar to that published by O'Curry, according to which a fairy woman whom Finn attempts to capture slams the door of the fairy-knoll upon his finger or thumb. This tale, according to the hypothesis, may be regarded as existing wholly independent of the Cúldub story and as being an attempt on the part of some composer to explain the origin of an existing tradition relating to Finn's magic thumb or finger.

With the assumed existence of **O* and **B*, an explanation for the origin of **X*, the source of *H* and *Y*, at once appears. It has previously been noted that both *H* and *Y* contain the incident concerning the smashed thumb, but that the fairy woman, though present in *H*, does not appear in *Y*. Since the thumb-smashing incident is preserved in both *H* and *Y*, it

seems safe to assume that this incident was also present in **X*, their common source. Yet there appears to be some ground for a conjecture that the fairy woman was not presented as a character in **X*. This conjecture is based on the fact that it is difficult to explain why, had the fairy woman been present in **X*, so conspicuous a detail should have been omitted by the composer of *Y*.

In accord with these considerations it would appear that the composer of **X* followed the tale **B* through the slaying of Cúldub. He then, knowing the story **O*, borrowed from that tale the incident concerning the smashed thumb or finger and, without taking over the detail regarding the fairy woman, blended the borrowed incident into his tale of Finn and Cúldub at a point following the slaying of the latter and preceding the wails of the fairy people. In conformity with the borrowed detail relating to the origin of Finn's magic thumb or finger, he put into Finn's mouth a "rhetoric." A part of this "rhetoric" he may have adapted from the lamentations of the fairy people as they appeared in **B*. The remainder of the "rhetoric" he may have invented. Therefore, **X* may be outlined as follows:

> Once when certain members of the *fian* were at Cind Cuirrig, they were engaged in cooking a pig. Cúldub ua Birgge stole the pig from them. Finn pursued Cúldub and with the cast of a spear struck down the goblin as the latter was entering the door of a fairy-knoll on the plain of Femen. *Finn attempted to enter the knoll, but the door was slammed upon his thumb (or finger). In order to ease the pain he inserted his thumb (or finger) in his mouth.* He thereupon heard the lament which was interspersed

with cries relating to the name of the slayer as well as to the name of the slain goblin. Finn then uttered the "rhetoric" *Bind, bind,* etc. and, picking up the pig, which the goblin had dropped, carried it back to his people.

If it may be assumed that such a tale represented the hypothetical **X*, then *Y* may be considered as an elaborated rendering of this tale in which the composer inserted details of his own creation. These details may have included certain portions of the "rhetoric" preserved in *Y*.

An explanation of the origin of *H*, however, still presents a problem. Since, in accordance with this second hypothesis, it is to be assumed that both the story which concerns Finn and Aed and that respecting Finn and Aillén are developments from the tale of Finn and Cúldub, it follows that the story of Finn and Aillén and that of Finn and Aed must trace their origins to versions of the Cúldub tale in which a fairy woman plays a part. The difficulty presented by these considerations at once disappears if it may be imagined that, serving as an intermediate step between **X* and *H*, there was a story which might be taken as the source of the tale relating to Finn and Aed.

This intermediate step, which will be designated **XX*, may then be explained as a development from **X* in which the composer, knowing some form of the story outlined by O'Curry and realizing that this tale contained not only the incident of the smashed thumb or finger but also an episode concerning a fairy woman, incorporated the latter episode in his composition. Accordingly, *H* may be explained as a condensed rendering of **XX* in which the composer inserted the allusion

to *imbas forosna,* a term believed by him to be the name of the magic practice attributed to Finn. The story of Finn and Aed, as has been indicated above, may in like manner be explained as a literary composition based in part upon **XX,* but greatly modified in pursuance of the whims of the composer. The tale of Finn and Aillén may similarly be considered in some degree a reflection of either **XX* or *H,* while that of Gae Glas may be a story developed under the influence of **A, *B,* and **X.* O'Curry's printed tale, *Z,* might then be regarded as a version of the original **O,* a part of which had been inserted in **X,* and a further part in **XX.* This second hypothesis presented in outline form appears as follows:

**A*

A goblin has injured a hero or a hero's friends. The hero kills the goblin through the medium of a magic spear.

(*Perceval*)

**B*

Once when members of the *fian* were at Cind Cuirrig, they were engaged in cooking a pig. Cúldub ua Birgge stole this pig. Finn pursued Cúldub and killed him with the cast of a spear as the goblin was entering the door of a fairy-knoll on the plain of Femen. A great lamentation interspersed with cries concerning the name of the slayer arose within the fairy-

knoll. Finn took the pig, which the goblin had dropped at the door of the knoll, and carried it back to his people.

(*Gae Glas*)

(A development reflecting details from **A*, **B*, and, perhaps, **X*.)

**O*

Once Finn was standing near a spring-well in the vicinity of *Sliabh na m-Ban*. A fairy woman appeared with a dripping vessel in her hand. Finn pursued her, but she escaped into the fairy-knoll. *As Finn extended his hand, the door of the fairy-knoll was closed, catching Finn's thumb (or finger) between the door and the post. Finn inserted his thumb (or finger) in his mouth.* At once he acquired the power of divination. Thereafter when he wished to know anything, he put his thumb (or finger) into his mouth.

**X*

Once when members of the *fian* were at Cind Cuirrig, they were engaged in cooking a pig. Cúldub ua Birgge stole the pig. Finn pursued Cúldub and slew him as the latter was entering the door of the fairy-knoll on the plain of Femen. *As Finn extended his hand, the door of the knoll was slammed upon his thumb. In order to ease the pain, Finn put his thumb into his mouth.* Thereupon he heard a great lamentation which arose within the knoll. Finn uttered an incantation as follows: *"Bind, bind . . . . . fri ulaid Cúldub."* He then took the pig back to his people.

**XX*

(Practically the same as **X*, except that the

Y

(An elaborated rendering of **X*.)

composer has included details regarding the fairy woman, a further borrowing from *O.)

H

(A condensed version of **XX* in which the composer has omitted certain parts of the "rhetoric" but has inserted an allusion to *imbas forosna.*)

(*Finn and Aed*)
(A literary composition based in part upon **XX.*)

(*Finn and Aillén*)
(A literary composition reflecting certain details from **XX* or *H.*)

Z

(O'Curry's Story. A modern version of **O.*)

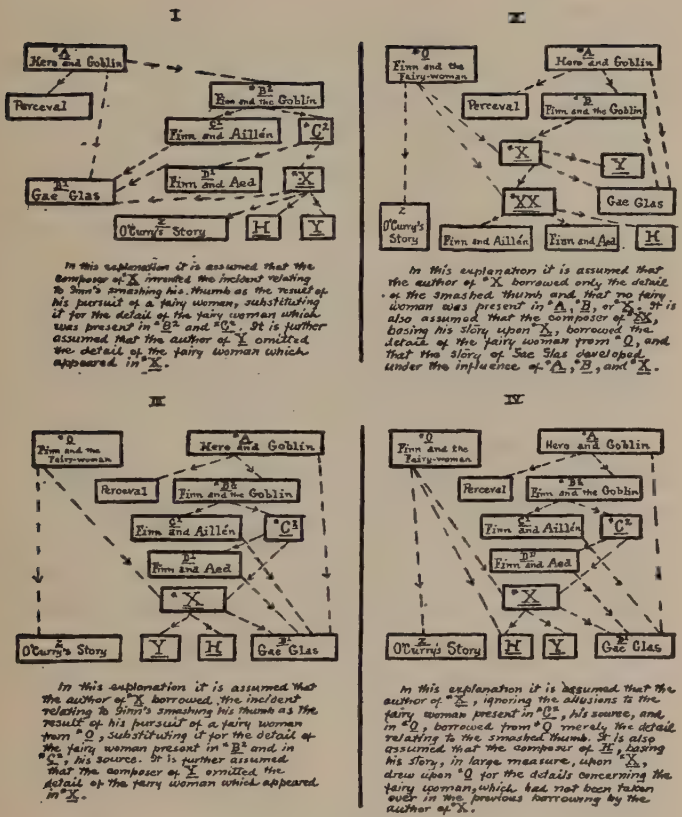
Two additional explanations, which, however, are very similar to the first of the hypotheses outlined above, may also be presented. The first of these (Hypothesis III) differs from Hypothesis I, above, in a number of details: (1) according to this explanation, one assumes—as in Hypothesis II, above—that a story, **O,* similar to that outlined by O'Curry, entirely unrelated to the legend of Cúldub and containing the episode of Finn's pursuit of the fairy woman and the smashed thumb, was extant in very early times; (2) it is assumed that the composer of **X,* instead of inventing the thumb-smashing detail—as is postulated in Hypothesis I—borrowed the incident relating to the pursuit of the fairy woman and the smashed thumb from **O,* substituting it for the detail regarding the fairy woman in his source, $*C^2$; (3) it is assumed that *H* and *Y* are developments from **X*—the author

of *Y*, however, ignoring the detail regarding the fairy woman present in **X*—and that O'Curry's version (*Z*) had its origin in **O*.

The second of these hypotheses (Hypothesis IV) differs from Hypothesis I, above, in the following particulars: (1) in this explanation the early existence of **O* is assumed as in Hypothesis III; (2) it is assumed that the author of **X*, ignoring the allusion to the fairy woman which was present in his source, **C*[3], as well as that which appeared in **O*, borrowed from **O* merely the detail regarding the smashed finger; (3) it is assumed that O'Curry's story, *Z*, is a direct development from **O*, that *Y* is traceable to **X*, but that the author of *H*—basing his story upon **X*—drew upon **O* for the details concerning the fairy woman, which had not been taken over in the previous borrowing from **O* by the composer of **X*. The diagram (Plate I) may help to make clear the several hypotheses regarding the relationship of these legends.

As has been indicated, an attempt to establish with any great degree of probability the exact relationships between these stories concerning Finn appears more or less futile. That the tales are intimately related, there can be no doubt. That there were many stories now lost which served as intermediate steps in the development of the tales still extant, seems to be a safe conjecture. It also appears not improbable that had such stories been preserved, conclusions which now seem plausible might be untenable.

Although there are certain weaknesses in the tentative explanations which have been suggested, on the whole the hypotheses seem to be relatively logical de-


I
Hero and Goblin
Perceval
Finn and the Goblin
Finn and Aillén
Gae Glas
Finn and Aed
O'Curry's Story
In this explanation it is assumed that the composer of X invented the incident relating to Finn's smashing his thumb as the result of his pursuit of a fairy woman, substituting it for the detail of the fairy woman which was present in B2 and C2. It is further assumed that the author of Y omitted the detail of the fairy woman which appeared in X.
II
Finn and the Fairy-woman
Hero and Goblin
Perceval
Finn and the Goblin
Finn and Aillén
Finn and Aed
O'Curry's Story
Gae Glas
In this explanation it is assumed that the author of X borrowed the incident relating to Finn's smashing his thumb as the result of his pursuit of a fairy woman from Q, substituting it for the detail of the fairy woman present in B2 and in C2, his source. It is further assumed that the composer of Y omitted the detail of the fairy woman which appeared in X.
III
Finn and the Fairy-woman
Hero and Goblin
Perceval
Finn and the Goblin
Finn and Aillén
Finn and Aed
XX
Gae Glas
O'Curry's Story
Finn and Aillén
Finn and Aed
In this explanation it is assumed that the author of X borrowed only the detail of the smashed thumb and that no fairy woman was present in A, B, or X. It is also assumed that the composer of XX, basing his story upon X, borrowed the details of the fairy woman from Q, and that the story of Gae Glas developed under the influence of A, B, and X.
IV
Finn and the Fairy-woman
Hero and Goblin
Perceval
Finn and the Goblin
Finn and Aillén
Finn and Aed
O'Curry's Story
Gae Glas
In this explanation it is assumed that the author of Z, ignoring the allusions to the fairy woman present in C2, his source, and, in Q, borrowed from Q merely the detail relating to the smashed thumb. It is also assumed that the composer of H, basing his story, in large measure, upon X, drew upon Q for the details concerning the fairy woman, which had not been taken over in the previous borrowing by the author of X.

ductions from the facts at hand. According to the second hypothesis, a story of Finn and Cúldub is set forth as a basis for the tale of Finn and Aed as well as for that of Finn and Aillén. The scene of this story of Finn and Cúldub is laid at Cind Cuirrig and on the plain of Femen. In support of this second hypothesis, it may be pointed out that, as far as can be determined, the oldest stratum of the Finn-cycle is composed in

large measure of tales which are localized in this same territory.[81] An attempt to justify the second hypothesis, in accordance with which the tale of Finn and Aillén and that of Finn and Aed are developments from **XX*, demands, however, an explanation to account for the omission of the incident relating to the smashed thumb or finger from the stories of Finn and Aillén and Finn and Aed.

Altogether, of the several hypotheses the fourth appears to be the most plausible. Whether or not any of them supplies a valid analysis of the relationships between these stories, it is relatively certain that prior to the tenth century traditions concerning Finn's magic thumb or finger were current in Ireland. It is also relatively certain that one or more stories purporting to explain the origin of this magic thumb or finger were in existence in Ireland at an equally early date. The origin of the tradition relating to the smashed thumb and the allusion to *imbas forosna* which is included in *H*, will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

[81] See note 16, *supra*.

CHAPTER II

THE THUMB OF KNOWLEDGE IN IRISH AND SCOTTISH TRADITION AFTER THE TENTH CENTURY

In his discussion of the poem ascribed to the twelfth-century poet, Gilla in Chomded húa Cormaic,[1] Meyer makes the following declaration:[2]

> "At the end of the poem we have the important statement that there were no less than 120 stories relating to the *fiana* which every genuine *fili* could recite . . . . . This is a very different state of things from the meagre number of epic tales relating to this cycle mentioned in the tenth-century list of tales. It shows how greatly during the two intervening centuries the legend had developed."

Whatever may be said regarding the number and distribution of stories relating to Finn before the tenth century, it is perfectly clear that in the following six or seven hundred years, tales concerning this hero became very numerous and attained an exceedingly wide circulation both in Ireland and in Scotland. A statement that in late Middle Irish as well as in Modern Irish and Scottish lore Finn is the outstanding and most widely known hero, is, perhaps, not an extravagant one. Furthermore, in the Middle Irish, as well as in the Modern Irish and Scottish tales regarding Finn, an ability to divine the unknown through the insertion of a

[1] See Meyer, *Anecdota Oxoniensia, Med. and Mod. Series,* Oxford, I, iv (1885), ix ff. Cf. *Academy,* XXVII (1885), 135. See also Chapter I, note 25, *supra.*

[2] *Fianaigecht,* pp. xxviii ff.

finger or thumb in his mouth is a constant element in his character.

Certain allusions to Finn's thumb of knowledge which have been preserved in Middle Irish texts may here be noted. A passage from the *Acallam na Senórach* follows:[3]

> "But when the hounds were told a great shortcoming was discovered in them: Bran, Sceolaing, Adnuall [were missing], and it was told to Finn. 'Have all three battalions of the Fianna searched out,' he said; yet though the search was made were not the hounds found.
>
> "To Finn then was brought an elongated basin of pale gold; he washed his kingly face, put his thumb under his knowledge-tooth, truth was revealed to him, and he said: 'the king of the Britons' son has deprived you of your hounds; pick ye therefore nine men to go in quest of them!' "

According to another passage in the *Acallam*[4], Caeilte [*sic*] relates to Ilbhrec of Assaroe that

> "a bowl of pale gold was brought to Finn, he washed his white hands, splashed the clear water about his face, and under his knowledge-tooth put his thumb. The true was revealed to him, the false hidden from his ken; and it was shewn him that in the world's later time both the boon-bestowing *Táilchenn* should come, and Kieran *mac an tsaoir* or 'the carpenter's son' found a house [i.e. Clonmacnoise] that should influence half of all Ireland."

[3] See edition and translation by S. H. O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica*, I (1892), 98, and II (1892), 105-6. Cf. the edition by Stokes, *IT*, IV, i (1900), lines 199-205. On the date of the *Acallam*, see Thurneysen, *Königsage*, pp. 45, 48. See further, Chapter I, note 23, *supra*.

[4] O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica*, I (1892), 134, and II (1892), 147. Cf. Stokes, *IT*, IV, i (1900), lines 1833-8.

An allusion to Finn's tooth of knowledge, preserved in the twelfth-century Book of Leinster, seems, as do the passages quoted from the *Acallam,* to locate the source of Finn's power in his tooth of knowledge.[5] It may further be noted that, although in the first of the two passages quoted from the *Acallam* a suggestion of an incantation follows Finn's insertion of his thumb in his mouth, in neither of them nor in the passage from the Book of Leinster is there an allusion to *imbas forosna, teinm laida,* or to any other form of incantation.

The Macgnímartha Finn. Of the early statements and legends relating to Finn's divining power, none is of more importance to this study than is an episode which forms part of the tale known as the *Macgnímartha Finn.*[6] The *Macgnímartha Finn* is preserved in no manuscript which can be dated earlier than the fifteenth century. There is reason to believe, however, that the story in practically its present form may be assigned to a much earlier date. That part of the tale which concerns the thumb of knowledge may be quoted as follows:[7]

[5] See *The Book of Leinster* (*RIA Facs.*), 207b, 21, from which the following lines are quoted:

Atrubair*t* friss a dét fiss. re mac *cum*aill cen eslis

I*n* tri*a*r út tánic dar muir. ro*m*ar*b* Duba*n* mac Bresail

See also Henderson, *The Celtic Review,* II (1905-6), 14, note; Stern, *Festschrift Whitley Stokes,* Leipzig, 1900, p. 8; Stern, *ZCP,* III (1901), 433. On the date of the Book of Leinster, see the *RIA* facsimile, Introduction; Thurneysen, *Königsage,* pp. 33 ff.

[6] See Chapter I, note 20, *supra.*

[7] This quotation is taken from Meyer's translation, *Ériu,* I (1904), 185 ff. For the Irish text, see the edition by Meyer, *RC,* V (1881-83), 201 ff. Cf. the edition and translation by John O'Donovan, *OS,* IV (1856), 300 ff.

"17. Thereupon he goes into Connaught, and finds Crimall as an old man in a desert wood there, and a number of the old *fian* together with him; and it is they who did the hunting for him. Then he shows (?) him the bag, and told him his story from beginning to end; how he had slain the man of the treasures. Finn bade farewell to Crimall, and went to learn poetry from Finnéces, who was on the Boyne.[8] He durst not remain in Ireland else, until he took to poetry, for fear of the son of Urgriu, and of the sons of Morna.

"18. Seven years Finnéces had been on the Boyne, watching the salmon of Fec's Pool; for it had been prophesied of him that he would eat the salmon of Féc, when nothing would remain unknown to him. The salmon was found, and Demne[9] was then ordered to cook the salmon; and the poet told him not to eat anything of the salmon. The youth brought him the salmon after cooking it. 'Hast thou eaten anything of the salmon, my lad?' says the poet. 'No,' says the youth, 'but I burned my thumb, and put it into my mouth afterwards.' 'What is thy name, my lad?' says he. 'Demne,' says the youth. 'Finn is thy name, my lad,' says he; 'and to thee was the salmon given to be eaten, and verily thou art the Finn.' Thereupon the youth eats the salmon. It is that which gave the knowledge to Finn, to wit, whenever he put his thumb into his mouth, and sang through *teinm láida,* then whatever he had been ignorant of would be revealed to him.[10]

[8] Meyer here supplies a note in which he translates a passage from *LL,* 186a 14, as follows: "For the poets thought that the place where poetry was revealed always was upon the brink of water."

[9] It is explained in Paragraph 4 that at Finn's birth the name "Demne" was given to him.

[10] O'Donovan's rendition of this sentence is not in accord

"19. He learnt the three things that constitute a poet, to wit, *teinm láida* and *imbas forosna* and *dichetul dichennaib*.[11] It is then Finn made this lay to prove his poetry:—

"20. May-day, season surpassing! Splendid is . ." etc.

Although the *Macgnímartha Finn* is found in no text older than the fifteenth century, the Book of Leinster (pp. 143a-145a) contains a twelfth-century poem ascribed to Gilla in Chomded húa Cormaic in which, among other matter, practically the whole of the story preserved in the *Macgnímartha Finn* is told in detail, even to the quotation of some verses that actually occur in the prose story. The early twelfth-century manuscript *Lebor na h-Uidre* also preserves a tale, *Fotha Catha Cnucha,* which seems to be merely another rendering of the first part of the story related in the *Macgnímartha Finn.* This text likewise includes verse passages identical with verses preserved in the prose work.

with that of Meyer. The Irish text, as given by Meyer, *RC,* V (1881-3), 201, follows:

"Is ed *sin* tra *dorat in fis do Finn .i. an tan do bered a ordain i n-a beolu ocus nocha na tria teinm laega, ocus no faillsithea do iarum in ni no bid 'n-a ainfis."*

According to O'Donovan's edition, *OS,* IV (1856), 302, the Irish text is:

"Is sin tra do rat in fis do Finn .i. an tan do bered a ordain ina beolu, ocus noc(h)an tria Teinmlaega, ocus ro faillsit(h)ea do iaram in ní ro bíd 'na ainfis."

O'Donovan, *op. cit.,* p. 303, translated this passage as follows: ". . . . . and it was from this the [preternatural] knowledge was given to Finn, i. e., when he used to put his thumb in his mouth, and not through Teinm Laegha [poetical incantation], whatever he had been ignorant of used to be revealed to him."

[11] Meyer, *Ériu,* I (1904), 186, notes, translates these terms as follows: *teinm láida,* "Illumination (?) of song"; *imbas forosna,* "Knowledge which illumines"; and *dichetul dichennaib,* "Extempore incantation."

The appearance in the *Fotha Catha Cnucha,* or in Gilla in Chomded's poem, of those incidents and verse passages likewise preserved in the *Macgnímartha Finn* makes it at once clear that at least certain parts of the *Macgnímartha Finn* are as old as the twelfth century. In fact, Meyer declares it to be a composition of that date.[12] Certain episodes, however, preserved in the *Macgnímartha Finn,* among which is that pertaining to Finn's burned finger and the salmon of knowledge, do not appear either in the *Fotha Catha Cnucha* or in Gilla in Chomded's poem. A question, therefore, regarding the presence of the episode of the salmon of knowledge in the prose tale presents itself. Did it occur in a story upon which Gilla in Chomded's poem is based, and did he omit it in the making of his poem? Was the episode extant in the twelfth century, or was it a post-twelfth-century creation which was added to the twelfth-century incidents—known to Gilla in Chomded—in the making of a later prose story, viz., the *Macgnímartha Finn*? A comparison of certain parts of the *Macgnímartha Finn,* the *Fotha Catha Cnucha,*[13]

[12] *Supra,* Chapter I, note 20. See further Meyer, *Fianaigecht,* p. xxviii, and his statements in *Anecdota Oxoniensia,* VIII (1894), viii and x; Brown, *Modern Philology,* XVIII (1920-21), 211-12, and notes; R. B. Pace, *PMLA,* XXXII (1917), 598 ff.

[13] *Fotha Catha Cnucha* has been edited from *LU* and translated by W. M. Hennessy, *RC,* II (1873-75), 86 ff. It has also been edited by Windisch, *Kurzgefasste irische Grammatik,* Leipzig, 1879, pp. 121 ff. See further H. d'Arbois de Jubainville, *L'Épopée celtique en Irlande,* Paris, 1892, pp. 379 ff.; George Henderson, *The Celtic Review,* II (1905-6), 9 ff. Gilla in Chomded's poem from *LL* has been edited and translated by Meyer, *Fianaigecht,* pp. 46 ff. See Chapter I, note 25, *supra.* This summary of the *Macgnímartha Finn* is made from the edition by Meyer (Irish text, *RC,* V [1881-3], 195 ff., and *AfcL,* I [1900], 482), *Ériu,* I (1904), 180 ff. The summary of the *Fotha Catha Cnucha* is taken from the edition by Hennessy, *RC,* II (1873-5), 86 ff.; and that of Gilla in Chomded's poem is from the edition by Meyer, *loc. cit.*

and Gilla in Chomded's poem may throw some light upon these questions.[14] Since the *Fotha Catha Cnucha* breaks off at the point where Gilla in Chomded's poem begins, the two works will be placed in the same column.

Fotha Catha Cnucha

Cathair Mór had a celebrated druid, Nuadu, to whom he gave land on which was built a *dún* called Almu. It may have received that name because *alamu* was rubbed on its walls until it was all white, or it may be that the hill was so named after Nuadu's wife, Almu. When Nuadu died, he left the *dún* Almu to his son, Tadhg. Tadhg's wife, Rairiu, bore to him a daughter, Murni Muncaim. Cumall, king-warrior of Ireland, took Murni by force in elopement. Tadhg complained to Cond, the high-king and Cumall's nephew, against Cumall. Cond ordered Cumall to restore the girl or to leave Ireland. Cu-

Macgnímartha Finn

[14] In his study of the relationship of these stories to that of "Sir Perceval," Brown, *Modern Philology,* XVIII (1920-21), 213 ff., presents an outline to which that included here is, in some respects, very similar. Since, however, certain important arguments relative to this investigation hinge upon details which do not appear in his outline, it seems well to incorporate what may appear to be a duplication, in some degree, of his work.

mall refused to obey, and the battle of Cnucha was fought between them.

Urgriu, son of Lugaid Corr, king of the Luagni, Daire Derc and his son Aed, afterward called Goll, were sent against Cumall. Cumall was killed by Goll. Luchet wounded Goll in the eye, whereof was said:

"'Aed was the name of Daire's son,
Until Luchet of fame wounded him;
Since the heavy lance wounded him,
Therefore, he has been called Goll.'"

Goll killed Luchet. "It is for that reason, moreover, that a hereditary feud existed between the sons of Morna and Find." Dairi had two names, *Morna* and *Dairi.*

Murni went to Cond and told him that, since she was pregnant, her father would not let her come home. Cond told her to go to Fiacal, son of Concend, and be delivered there, since Fiacal's wife, Bodball Bendron, was a sister to Cumall. Condla,

1

Cumall and Urgriu quarreled over the chieftainship of the *fian* and the high-stewardship of Ireland.

2

Then the battle of Cnucha was fought between them. In this battle Luchet wounded Aed, son of Morna, who was fighting on the side of Urgriu, destroying one of Aed's eyes. Aed was thereafter called Goll. The man who kept Cumall's treasure-bag wounded Cumall in the battle. Cumall was slain in the battle by Goll, son of Morna, "whence there was a hereditary feud between Finn and the sons of Morna."

3

Hence sang the shanachie:—

"'Goll, son of Daire the Red, with fame,'" etc.

(Here follow seven four-line stanzas describing Goll, the battle, other participants, and Goll's later affairs with Finn. Stanza 7 of this poem is identical

Cond's servant, went with her to Fiacal's house. The girl was there delivered of a son, who was named *Demni*. The boy was nursed by them until he was capable of plundering everyone who was an enemy to him. Threatened with battle by Find, Tadhg gives Almu to Find as an *eric* for the death of his father.

(Here follow eight lines of verse relating to Finn's demand of Tadhg.)

Find went to Almu and there made his abode. The Clann-Morna gave *eric* for his father, and peace was concluded between them. This peace lasted until a quarrel arose regarding the Slanga-pig, and Banb-Sinna was slain; of which was said: "'Afterwards they made peace—
Find and Goll of mighty deeds—
Until Banb-Sinna was slain
Regarding the pig, in Temhair Luachra.'"

with the stanza concerning the wounding of Goll quoted from the *Fotha Catha Cnucha*; and Stanza 6 is identical with the quatrain which appears at the end of the *Fotha Catha Cnucha.*)

4

After Cumall's death his wife brought forth a son, Demne. Fiacail, son of Conchinn, and Bodbmall, the druidess, and the Grey One of Luachair came to Muirne and carried away the boy, for his mother durst not let him be with her. Bodbmall and the Grey One took the boy to the forest of Slieve Bloom. There the boy was secretly reared, a necessary course, since warriors of the Luaigni and of the sons of Morna were lying in wait for him, as well as for Tulcha, the son of Cumall.

5

At the end of six years his mother came to visit him. She folded the boy in her arms and made the quatrains:

" 'Sleep in peaceful slumber,' " etc.

(This poem does not appear in the text.)

She then told the women-warriors to take charge of the boy until he should be fit to be a warrior.

6

One day he went out and saw ducks upon a lake. "He sent a shot among them, which cut off the feathers and wings of one, so that a trance fell upon her; and then he seized her and took her with him to the hunting-booth. And that was Finn's first chase."

7

He afterward went out with certain *cairds* whom Fiacail, the son of Codna, killed. The two women-warriors came to Fiacail's house, where Demne was then living, and the boy was given to them. They took him with them to Slieve Bloom.

Gilla in Chomded's Poem

2

"Glasdic was his name originally, the sons of Morna named him Finn; seven years he was in hard plight, under Loch Ree he found fair help."

3 and 4

"Finn's first race—it was a chosen course—which he ever ran before the sons of Morna, into Loch Corrib . . . . . .to lofty Slieve Aughty in one day."

8

One day he went to Moy Liffey and won a game of hurling from the entire crowd of youths gathered there.

9

The man of the stronghold, having been told of the exploits of the strange youth and also that the boy was fair (*finn*), said that Demne's name should be *Finn*.

10-11

The next day during a quarrel D e m n e threw seven of the youths to the ground. Later in the week he drowned nine of them. The youths declared that Finn did it. Thereafter the name *Finn* clave to him.

12

One day Finn pursued and caught two bucks, bringing them with him to the hunting-booth. Soon afterward the women-warriors told him that he must leave, since the sons of Morna were watching to kill him.

11

". . . . . he ran a race with the deer (?) of Fiac-lach, Conchenn's son."

16

"Seven deer by Slieve Bloom was Finn's first chase,—a brave and stout exertion—. . ."

13

He thereupon went to Lough Leane and took military service with the king of Bantry.

14

He afterward went to Kerry, where he took military service with the king of that land. The king of Kerry, learning that he was the son of Cumall, advised him to depart, since he did not wish Finn to be slain while there.

15

Finn then went to the house of Lochán, a smith,

who made two spears for him. With one of the spears, Finn killed a sow, the Beo, and took the head of the sow to the smith, whose daughter, Cruithne, had become Finn's wife.

16

After that he went into Connaught, where he met a weeping woman, who related to him that her son, Glonda, had been slain by a terrible warrior. Finn pursued the warrior and killed him, taking from him the treasure-bag which contained the treasures of Cumall. This terrible warrior was the Grey One of Luachair, who had dealt the first wound to Cumall in the battle of Cnucha.

17

Finn then went into Connaught and found Crimall, who had a number of the old *fian* with him. To them he told the story. He then went to learn poetry from F i n n é c e s, who was on the Boyne. "He durst not remain in Ireland else, until he took to poetry, for fear of the son of Urgriu, and of the sons of Morna."

28

"Thirty jewels—. . Finn took out of the jaws of the crane-bag, after he had slain Glonna at the vast ford and Liath Luachra of the swift deeds."

18

For seven years Finnéces had been watching the salmon of Feċ's Pool, for it had been prophesied of him that he would eat the salmon of Féc, and that thereafter nothing should remain unknown to him. The salmon was caught; Finn cooked it, burned his thumb, put his thumb into his mouth, and thus attained supernatural wisdom.

19

He learned the three things that constitute a poet, to wit, *"teinm láida* and *imbas forosna* and *dichetul dichennaib.* It is then Finn made this lay to prove his poetry:—"

20

" 'May-day, season surpassing!' " etc.

(Here follows a poem of fourteen lines, each line being of a length sufficient for a quatrain.)

8

"For fear of sword-fierce Conn Finn went to learn noble poetry: Cethern Fintan's son, he was his tutor in poetic composition."

21

Finn then went to Cethern, the son of Fintan, further to learn poetry with him. At that time there was a beautiful maiden in the fairy-knoll

of Bri Ele. Of each man of Ireland who went to woo her one of the followers was killed.

9

"After a feast the *fiana* bring Finn to avenge the poet Orcbél; the fairy-woman from Slieve Slánga had achieved the fierce bold deed."

22

Like everyone else, Cethern went to woo the maiden, and one of his people, Oircbel, the poet, was slain. Now at this time the name of Cumall's son was Finnéces.

23

Finn then went to the house of Fiacail mac Conchinn and told Fiacail of the slaying. Fiacail told him to go to the two Paps of Anu, behind Luachair.

13

"In revenge of the poet Orcbél Finn slew Ua Fidga at a feast in the west at the Paps, ... with the spear of Fiaclach, Conchenn's son."

24

Finn did so. A man came out of one of the knolls carrying food. Finn made a cast at him with the spear of Fiacail.

14

"Two staves Finn heard at the mound of the Paps above him: 'Stalwarth Ua Fidga has been slain,' was the exact beginning of the first stave."

25

He then heard a lament:

" 'On the Barrow, by a sharp-pointed spear,
Aed, Fidga's son, has fallen:
By the spear of Fiacail, Codna's son,
Finn has slain him . . .' "[15]

Fiacail came, and Finn

[15] There is also an allusion to this incident in a poem beginning, *Échta Lagen for Leth Chuind, LL* (*RIA Facs.*), 48b 41.

15

"'Venom is the spear,' was the powerful beginning of the second stave, —I know it not; there after the deed of valour on bright Allhallowe'en he heard them."

told him about the hurling of the spear. A wailing was heard in the fairy-knoll:

"'Venom is this spear,
And venomous he whose it is,
Venomous whoever threw it,
Venom for him whom it laid low.'"

26

Outside the fairy-knoll, Finn seized a woman who promised that if she were released, the spear would be returned. As she went into the knoll, the woman said:

"'Venom the spear,
And venom the hand that threw it!
If it is not cast out of the knoll,
A murrain will seize the land.'"

The spear was then thrown out, and Finn took it to Fiacail. Fiacail gave the spear to Finn and told him that the man he had killed was the one who had slain his comrade.

27

Finn then went with

Fiacail to Inver Colptha. Fiacail, who was a great runner, weighted himself down with twelve balls of lead. As they proceeded, Fiacail threw these balls from him. Finn picked them up and, carrying them with him, still kept pace with Fiacail.

28

During the night at Inver Colptha, Finn heard a cry, and, having gone northward, overtook three fairy women. As the women were entering the fairy-knoll of Slanga, Finn snatched a brooch from the cloak of one of them. The woman promised Finn a reward for the brooch . . . . . .

17

"A vessel full of gold, of glorious silver, the woman out of Slieve Slánga gave to him; we know for certain that this was the first fair treasure which he took to the *fian* for noble distribution."[16]

[16] More complete summaries of Paragraphs 17-20 and 21-28 of the *Macgnímartha Finn*, as well as quotations of Stanzas 5, 6, 8-10, 13-17 from Gilla in Chomded's poem, have appeared above in this investigation. Since, however, this table is presented for the purpose of showing at a glance what parts of the *Macgnímartha Finn* appear, as well as what parts do not appear, in twelfth-century compositions, it seems advisable to include in the table paragraphs and stanzas, even though they may have been summarized or quoted in preceding pages.

A glance at the foregoing table reveals at once the fact that a large number of the episodes included in the *Macgnímartha Finn* were known as early as the twelfth century, since they are also preserved either in the *Fotha Catha Cnucha* or in Gilla in Chomded's poem. It will be noted, however, that there are passages in the *Macgnímartha Finn* which are not found in either of the twelfth-century texts. It will also be observed that, in the different compositions, passages bearing on the same incidents frequently fail to agree, and that in some cases the narrative recorded in the composition exhibits certain discrepancies.

As a first step in an investigation of the story related in the *Macgnímartha Finn,* one may undertake a critical examination of the *Fotha Catha Cnucha,* which contains certain episodes likewise preserved in the first four paragraphs of the later work. The *Fotha Catha Cnucha* begins with a passage which relates that Cathair Mór gave land to the druid Nuadu; that a *dún* was built thereupon; that *alamu* was rubbed on the walls until they were all white; and that "perhaps it was from that (the name) 'Almu' was applied to it; of which was said:

> All-white is the *dún* of battle renown
> As if it had received the lime of Ireland;"

The next paragraph records that Nuadu's wife, Almu, the daughter of Becan, requested that her name be given to the hill; that the request was granted; and that she was buried there, of which was said:

> "Almu—beautiful was the woman!—
> Wife of Nuadhu the great, son of Achi."

Obviously, here is confusion in the narrative. Two different explanations for the name *Almu* appear.

The examination, however, of a tenth-century poetic *Dindshenchas,* "Almu I," throws some light upon the matter.[17] The story recorded in "Almu I" may be outlined as follows:

> Almu, the fort of the Fians which Find used to frequent, got its name from a woman, Almu. Almu was the name of the man who got the place in the time of Nemed.
>
> (Here the narrative seems to break abruptly, the next stanza beginning:)
>
> Almu, a beautiful woman, the wife of Nuadu Mor, son of Achi, asked that her name should be given to the hill. Nuadu rubbed alum on the fort after it was marked out. All white is the fort as if it had received the lime of all Erin. From the alum he put on the house, Almu is so named. Tadc, son of Nuadu, later became owner of the fort. Tadc had a beautiful daughter, Murni Mun-cháem. Cumall asked for the girl but was refused. Cumall thereupon carried Murni away. Tadc went to Cond and satirized him, as a result of which Cond ordered Cumall to leave Banba. The battle of Cnucha was then fought, and Cumall fell before Cond. Nine hours before the battle took place, Find was conceived. After Cumall had fallen, Murni went to Tadc. Tadc, however, threatened to kill her and her unborn child. Cond protested against this, saying that the woman who bore his (Cond's) father was also the mother of Cumall. Murni thereupon went to Cond, who advised her

[17] "Almu I" is preserved only in *LL.* Four stanzas, however, of this poem, 3, 5, 21, and 22, are incorporated in the *Fotha Catha Cnucha,* which is preserved in *LU.* The poem has been edited and translated by Edward Gwynn, *The Metrical Dindshenchas,* II, *RIA, TLS,* IX (1906), 72 ff. Cf. Gwynn, *Poems from the Dindshenchas, RIA, TLS,* VII (1900), 14 ff. Meyer, *Fianaigecht,* p. xxii, assigns it to the tenth century. The summary here given is based on Gwynn's edition and translation.

to go to Fiacail Fí, son of Conchend, since Bodmall, the sister of Cumall, dwelt with Fiacail. Conla, a servant of Cond, went with her, and both Fiacail and Bodmall were glad to see her. Thereafter Find was born, and for nine years he was the royal champion of Erin. He demanded of Tadc of the Towers that Tadc should either give him a price for the killing of Cumall, or that Tadc should submit to battle at once, or to single combat. Tadc could not face battle against the true-born prince, so he gave up all Almu as it stood.

Another *Dindshenchas,* "Almu II," which, in all probability, is as old as the twelfth century, supplies a different account of the origin of the name *Almu.*[18] According to this story, Almu, the daughter of Beccan, was the wife of Iuchna, the owner of many cattle. From her the fort received its name. The prose *Dindshenchas, Adarca Hua Failgi,* relates that after Iuchna's death she returned to her father's stead, where she died of grief for her husband and for the destruction of her cattle.[19] In the prose tale several other explanations of the name *Almu* are given.

It is clear that the story recorded in the *Fotha Catha Cnucha* bears a close similarity to the tale preserved in "Almu I." In fact, Stanzas 3, 5, 21, and 22 of the poem appear in the prose text. There are, however, certain important features in the *Fotha Catha Cnucha* which are not found in the poem. These features in-

[18] For edition, translation, and a list of the manuscripts in which this poem is preserved, see Edward Gwynn, *The Metrical Dindshenchas,* II, *RIA, TLS,* IX (1906), 78 ff. On the date, see Meyer, *Fianaigecht,* p. xxii, and Thurneysen, *Königsage,* p. 38.

[19] For edition, translation, and data concerning manuscripts, see Whitley Stokes, *RC,* XV (1894), 308 ff.

clude allusions to Urgriu and Goll, as well as statements concerning the destruction of Goll's eye and the hereditary feud between Finn and the sons of Morna. They also include a statement regarding the killing of Luchet, and the two quatrains bearing upon events connected with Goll. Since the story recorded in the *Fotha Catha Cnucha* bears such a striking similarity to that preserved in "Almu I," even to the appearance of identical quatrains in the two compositions, the presence of certain details in the *Fotha Catha Cnucha* which do not appear in the tenth-century poem becomes matter for investigation.

In the *Fotha Catha Cnucha,* as has been indicated above, four stanzas are included which also occur as a part of the tenth-century narrative in verse, "Almu I." Furthermore, in the *Fotha Catha Cnucha,* there are two strophes which do not appear in "Almu I," but which do form a part of a seven-stanza poem concerning Goll preserved in the *Macgnímartha Finn.* It would be difficult to believe that either the composer of "Almu I" or the composer of the seven stanzas relating to Goll had based his work on the *Fotha Catha Cnucha,* taking three and two stanzas respectively from that work and composing other stanzas which, when added to the borrowed ones, complete the compositions as we now know them. Again, had the composer of "Almu I" based his poem on the *Fotha Catha Cnucha,* it seems unlikely, considering the minute details incorporated in his work, that he would have omitted the conspicuous features which concern Urgriu, Goll, etc. It would thus appear that the stanzas in the *Fotha Catha Cnucha* regarding Goll are only two stanzas from a longer poem, part of

which, at least, is preserved in the *Macgnímartha Finn.* It would further appear that the four strophes in the *Fotha Catha Cnucha* which are also found in "Almu I" are merely parts of a longer poem either identical with, or similar to, "Almu I." But, may not "Almu I," as it is preserved, be only a fragment of a longer poem which contained the seven stanzas relating to Goll, the statements concerning Urgriu, Luchet, etc., and is it not possible that the *Fotha Catha Cnucha* had its origin in such a poem? The facts that the story regarding the cause of the battle of Cnucha as related in "Almu I" appears to be a complete and unbroken narrative, and that in no part of the narrative as it stands is there an allusion to Goll, Urgriu, or the feud, make it appear improbable that the seven stanzas preserved in the *Macgnímartha Finn* were ever a part of a poem of which "Almu I" is a fragment, and, consequently, improbable that the *Fotha Catha Cnucha* could have been based solely upon such a poem. Altogether, the *Fotha Catha Cnucha* seems to be a blending of two stories. One of these is the tale preserved in "Almu I," which concerns Cond, Tadc, and Cumall and which attributes the cause of the battle to the abduction of Murni. In this tale features have apparently been inserted from a story similar to that preserved in the *Macgnímartha Finn*—this new material dealing with Urgriu, Goll, and Cumall and attributing the battle to a quarrel over the chieftainship of the *fiana.* It further appears not improbable that "Almu I," as it is preserved, was the first of these sources. "Almu I," however, is obviously a patchwork. It will be noted that in "Almu II," as well as in the prose *Adarca Hua Failgi,* Almu is the daughter of Beccan (Becan) and the wife of Iuchna,

whereas in "Almu I" she is likewise the daughter of Beccan, but is married to Nuadu. "Almu I" also gives two different reasons for the application of the name *Almu* to the *dún*. It may further be noted that in the first few stanzas of "Almu I" the narrative breaks off abruptly and starts anew. Apparently the composer of the *LL* poem blended two different explanations of the name of the fort into a story which concerned the battle of Cnucha. One or both of these explanations he may have known as existing tales; or he may have created either or both of them himself. Since in the story of Nuadu, as well as in that of Iuchna, the father of Almu is said to be Beccan (Becan), it appears not improbable that one of these tales is a modified version of the other.

That the *Fotha Catha Cnucha* is, in part at least, based on "Almu I" is manifest from the fact that the two explanations for the name of Nuadu's *dún* are included in both works. Using the tale preserved in "Almu I" as a basis for his work, the composer of the *Fotha Catha Cnucha* apparently followed the story as related in the poem, incorporating two of the stanzas bodily, through the point where Cond orders Cumall to leave Ireland. At this juncture he seems to have drawn upon other sources, blending details relating to the battle in which Cumall and Luchet were slain and Goll lost his eye. At this point, likewise, probably from the source which supplied the details of the battle, he incorporated one of the seven stanzas concerning Goll which appear in the *Macgnímartha Finn*. He thereupon took up the narrative as related in "Almu I," following it through Finn's securing of Almu from Tadc, where he incorporated eight lines of verse which are

also found in "Almu I." Reverting to the other source, or sources, he continued with a passage relating to the quarrels between Goll and Finn and closed his composition with another strophe from the seven-stanza poem about Goll, noted above. It may be observed in passing that these seven stanzas preserved in the *Macgnímartha Finn* seem to form a complete poem.

In its general aspects this explanation is apparently in accord with the views held by Brown, who states:[20]

> "The *Fotha Catha* is also a piecing together of independent accounts. One of them was probably the tenth-century metrical *Dindshenchas* 'Almu I' (ed. Gwynn, *RIA, Todd Lecture Series,* IX (1906), 72-77, from *LL*). This knows nothing of Goll, but mentions Fiacail and Bodmall. The other source must have told of Goll."

Since the *Fotha Catha Cnucha* contains the details relating to Goll, Luchet, and Urgriu and describes the battle in which they participated, the story preserved in the first four paragraphs of the *Macgnímartha Finn* was obviously in existence as early as the beginning of the twelfth century. It furthermore appears not improbable that the twelfth-century composer of the *Fotha Catha Cnucha* either had in memory the two accounts or had before him a written copy of the poem concerning Goll. As evidence bearing on the antiquity of the tradition recorded in these first four paragraphs, it may be noted that the quarrel between Urgriu and Cumall is reflected in a tenth-century text where the three sons of Urgriu appear to be in some way connected with Finn's death.[21] Two tenth-century poems

[20] *Modern Philology,* XVIII (1920-21), 224.
[21] See Meyer, *ZCP,* I (1897), 462 ff. On the date, see Meyer, *Fianaigecht,* p. xxv.

ascribed to Cináed úa Hartacáin attribute Finn's death to the warriors of the Lúaigne,[22] to whom allusion is made in Paragraph 4, and a statement concerning Cumall's son Tulcha, also mentioned in Paragraph 4, is preserved in a text which may be as old as the seventh century.[23] Altogether, it appears that the traditions underlying the first four sections of the *Macgnímartha Finn* are not merely as old as the twelfth century, but may be assigned to a very much earlier date.

As is the case with regard to the first four sections of the *Macgnímartha Finn,* episodes preserved in ten, or possibly fourteen, of the remaining twenty-four sections of this work are also reflected in texts from the twelfth century and earlier. Evidence that episodes similar to those recorded in Sections 8-11 were in existence in the twelfth century appears in Gilla in Chomded's words (2) relating to the action of the sons of Morna in changing the name of Glasdic to *Finn.* Although the *Macgnímartha Finn* does not state that the

[22] Meyer, *Fianaigecht,* p. xxii. See also Stokes, *RC,* XXIII (1902), 310. Concerning Finn's death, see Meyer, *Fianaigecht,* pp. xxvi and 99; Stokes, *RC,* XXIII (1902), 303 ff., 311; XVII (1896), 21; XVIII (1897), 383; *The Tripartite Life of Patrick,* ed. and trans. by Stokes, London, II (1887), 537; D. MacInnes and A. Nutt, *Folk and Hero Tales from Argyllshire,* London, 1890, pp. 401 ff.; *OS,* I (1853), 11, 60, 126; II (1854), 29 ff., 131; III (1855), 300, note; IV (1856), xxxi; O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica,* London, II (1892), 98, 166, 175, 520; Meyer, *RC,* VI (1883-5), 189 ff.; Meyer, *Anecdota Oxoniensia, Med. and Mod. Series,* I, iv (1885), 72 ff.; The Four Masters, *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland,* I (ed. O'Donovan, 2d ed., Dublin, 1856), 119 ff.; Keating, *History of Ireland,* ed. O'Mahony, New York, 1857, p. 361, note; Maura Power, *ZCP,* XI (1917), 50; Gwynn, *The Metrical Dindshenchas,* II, *RIA, TLS,* IX (1906), 13; K. Meyer and A. Nutt, *The Voyage of Bran,* London, I (1895), 138; *Leabhar na Feinne,* ed. J. F. Campbell, London, I (1872), 34, 195; J. A. MacCulloch, *The Religion of the Ancient Celts,* Edinburgh, 1911, p. 151.

[23] Meyer, *Fianaigecht,* p. xvii.

sons of Morna were responsible for changing the name *Demne* to *Finn,* it seems perfectly clear that both the *Macgnímartha Finn* and Gilla in Chomded's poem are based on some early version of an episode from the Finn-saga which was similar to that preserved in Sections 9-10 of the prose work; and it appears to be equally certain that the incidents included in these sections are intimately related to similar incidents which concern Cuchulinn.[24] A comparison of Sections 12, 16, 21-28 of the *Macgnímartha Finn* with Strophes 11, 16, 28, 8, 9, 13, 15, and 17 of Gilla in Chomded's poem makes it also practically certain that the poem is based on some version of a tale very similar to that preserved in the later prose account. In fact, Strophe 15 of the poem contains the first line of a quatrain which appears in full in Section 25 of the *Macgnímartha Finn.* It is also worthy of note that in a tenth-century poem preserved in *LL* an allusion to Finn's killing of Aed mac Fidaig because of the maiden of Bri Éile clearly shows that some version of the incident in the *Macgnímartha Finn* was in existence as early as the tenth century.[25]

Sections 5-7, 13-15, and 17-20 of the *Macgnímartha Finn* do not appear to be reflected in either the *Fotha Catha Cnucha* or the twelfth-century poem. Section 6, however, is practically identical with the story related of Cuchulinn, according to which, by throwing a stone, he brought down sixteen swans and captured them alive.[26] The episode which concerns Finn relates that

[24] See J. Dunn, *Táin Bó Cúalnge,* London, 1914, pp. 47 ff. and 74.

[25] See Chapter I, note 26, and text. Meyer, *Fianaigecht,* p. xxiii, note 1, calls attention to another tenth-century poem ascribed to Broccán Cráibdech which mentions the grave of Aed mac Fidaig.

[26] J. Dunn, *Táin Bó Cúalnge,* London, 1914, pp. 74 ff.

the throw "cut the feathers and wings from one so that a trance fell upon her," and that thereupon Finn was able to capture her alive. Although the Cuchulinn story clearly shows that Cuchulinn captured the birds *alive,* it contains no explanation, as does the Finn story, of how the capture was effected. On the whole, since the Finn story of this capture explains how a bird was taken by cutting off its feathers and wings, it appears to be nearer to what may have been the original tale and, consequently, to be a reflection of an older version of the episode than that preserved in the *Táin.* Section 6 of the *Macgnímartha Finn,* apparently simply another version of the episode preserved in the *Macgnímrada Conculaind,* must have been a part of, or must have had its source in, that Finn story to which one may trace Sections 8-11, which are likewise only different versions of episodes preserved in the *Macgnímrada Conculaind.* The same may be said concerning Section 12. The *Macgnímrada Conculaind* records that Cuchulinn outran and captured alive two stout, swift deer; and in Section 12 of the *Macgnímartha Finn,* Finn duplicates this feat. Since this early story concerning the youthful deeds of Finn—apparently the source of Sections 6, 8-12 of the *Macgnímartha Finn* and obviously closely related to the similar tale regarding Cuchulinn—[27] is reflected in Strophes 2, 11, and 16 of

[27] The story of Cuchulinn relates that he worsted the boys at hurling and other games, killed fifty of them in a fight (Dunn, *op. cit.,* p. 51), outran and caught two swift deer, and captured the sixteen swans alive (*ibid.,* pp. 74 ff.). Very similar feats are recorded of Finn; see Sections 6, 8-12, above. These parallels at once suggest that the story of Finn's boyish deeds is merely an imitation of the more ancient tale concerning Cuchulinn. It appears not improbable, however, as has been indicated above, that certain episodes of the Finn story may reflect a version of the tale which is older than that preserved in the *Táin bó Cúailnge.*

Gilla in Chomded's poem, it is relatively certain that this narrative of Finn's boyish exploits was in existence as early as the twelfth century.

The statements concerning the hunting-booth and the fear of the sons of Morna in Section 5 of the *Macgnímartha Finn* make it plain that the episode reflected there belongs to the story which underlay Sections 1-4 preceding. Section 7 concerns an incident which seems to be connected with the same tale: Fiacail, the son of Codna, is evidently the Fiacail mac Conchinn who appears in Section 23. In fact, in the quatrain quoted in Section 25 (evidently the first of the "two staves" concerning which there is an allusion in Gilla in Chomded's poem, Strophe 14), he is called Fiacail, Codna's son.

Texts earlier than the twelfth century seem to preserve no statements relating to the incidents included in Sections 13-14, although Section 13 mentions Tulcha, son of Cumall, who also appears in the very ancient text cited above.[28] Sections 13-14, moreover, contain the idea found in Sections 1-4 regarding the feud with the sons of Morna.

No allusion to events recorded in Sections 17-20 is included either in the *Fotha Catha Cnucha* or in Gilla in Chomded's poem. A statement, however, concerning Crimall, the son of Trénmór, who is mentioned in Sections 16 and 17, occurs in a poem assigned to Flannacán mac Cellaig which may be as old as the ninth century.[29] Section 17 likewise contains a statement re-

[28] See note 23, *supra*.

[29] This poem, preserved in *YBL*, contains a statement that the deaths of Finn and Crimall, who was apparently Finn's uncle, took place on a Wednesday. See Meyer, *Fianaigecht*, p. xxi, and *YBL* (*RIA Facs.*), 125a.

lating to the feud between Finn and his father's enemies, the son of Urgriu and the sons of Morna, a tradition which forms a part of the tale preserved in the *Fotha Catha Cnucha* and which is undoubtedly very ancient.

The story of Finn's burning his finger on the cooking salmon does not appear to be reflected in texts previous to the fifteenth century; but the tradition, however, that Finn became possessed of supernatural wisdom through putting his thumb or finger into his mouth was not only existent but was widely circulated in Ireland before the tenth century, when it was also associated with the magic incantations *teinm laida* and *imbas forosna.*[30] It should further be noted that the poem preserved as Section 20 of the *Macgnímartha Finn* is, in all probability, as old as the tenth century.[31]

On the whole, that portion of the *Macgnímartha Finn* included in Sections 16-21 exhibits what seems to be a certain confusion in the incidents and details presented. In Section 16 the Grey One of Luachair appears as the warrior who, according to Section 2, wounded Cumall in battle, although according to Section 4, this Grey One is one of the female warriors who acted as foster-mothers to Finn. As both Nutt and Brown have pointed out,[32] this passage seems to involve an inconsistency which points toward a conjecture that the composer had been patching together certain incidents which

[30] See stories and discussion in Chapter I.

[31] Meyer, *Fianaigecht,* p. xxiii. See also Meyer, *Four Old Irish Songs of Summer and Winter,* London, 1903, pp. 5 ff.; Stokes, *RC,* XX (1899), 258; D. MacInnes and A. Nutt, *Folk and Hero Tales,* London, 1890, p. 403.

[32] This point has been noted by Nutt, *Folk-Lore Record,* IV (1881), 17, note; and by Brown, *Modern Philology,* XVIII (1920-21), 223.

he knew, and had been guilty of a rather awkward blending. Such a conclusion is strengthened by reference to Section 21, which states that "Finn went to Cethern, the son of Fintan, further to learn poetry with him," and again by reference to the statement in Section 22, that Finn's name at that time was *Finnéces.* Finn's going to Finnéces to learn poetry (Section 17) and his later going to Cethern "further to learn poetry with him" (Section 21), look as if the composer had either blended different versions of a story concerning Finn's youthful activities, or had woven into his basic tale a number of episodes relating to Finn which he knew, or which he invented for the occasion. It further appears not improbable that the composer, knowing the tenth-century poem, Section 20, ascribed it to Finn and inserted it in his work. It is possible, however, that this poem had already been ascribed to Finn and had been included in one of the early traditions concerning Finn upon which the composer drew.

Since Finn's going to Cethern mac Fintan for the purpose of learning poetry is mentioned in Gilla in Chomded's poem, this episode evidently belonged to a very early version of a story concerning Finn's exploits which included the slaying of Aed, son of Fidga.

What, then, may be said of the episode according to which Finn burns his finger on the cooking salmon? A critical examination of this passage, Sections 18-19, reveals at the outset the tradition that the eating of the salmon of Féc not merely gave the ability to make poetry, but insured the power of foresight. The youth, having burned his thumb on the cooking salmon, inserts his thumb in his mouth, thus accidentally tasting

of the forbidden dish. So far this fits well with the pre-tenth-century tales according to which the thumb became imbued with magic properties because it had been thrust into the abode of a supernatural people. Finn burns his thumb on the magic salmon. The thumb becomes imbued with the magic qualities of the fish, and thereafter, when Finn inserts his thumb in his mouth, he becomes temporarily possessed of the power of foresight. According to the episode in the *Macgnímartha Finn,* however, after learning from the poet that his name is to be *Finn,* not *Demne,* and that it was foreordained that he eat the salmon, Finn *eats* the magic fish. Here there seems to be some confusion. It is easy to imagine a *motif* according to which a person might burn a finger on a cooking animal, thrust the finger into his mouth to ease the pain, and, thereby having discovered through tasting that the flesh of the animal imparts magic powers, *eat* the animal in order to attain these fully. It is difficult, on the other hand, to see why, since he has eaten the fish and has consequently passed into the state where nothing remains unknown to him, it should thereafter be necessary for Finn to insert his thumb in his mouth in order to become possessed of the divining power. An examination of certain versions of this episode preserved in the oral tradition of both Ireland and Scotland may shed some light upon the points in question.

A vast group of tales concerning Finn and his *fian* exists in modern Irish and Scottish tradition, some of them, in all probability, of very ancient origin, though many are undoubtedly late. Throughout these tales, which are very generally known and widely distributed,

the divining power as connected with the thumb of knowledge seems to be considered a constituent part of Finn's character and to be taken as a matter of course.

Several stories existing in modern Irish tradition purport to explain the origin of Finn's power. Of these, the one most widely known and generally accepted is very similar to the episode preserved in the *Macgnímartha Finn*. It may be summarized as follows:[33]

> "After Fionn had lost Boghman, his foster-mother, at Lurgangreen,[34] he wandered about until he came to the banks of the river Boyne. Here he met some fishermen who had been sent by his enemies to ply their craft, in the hope that they might chance to take the *buadha* (salmon of fore-knowledge) of the Boyne. Fionn took shelter in the temporary hut they had constructed, and they soon after killed a beautiful salmon which glistened with specks of gold. They immediately set the salmon before the fire to broil slowly; and being much fatigued they laid [*sic*] down to rest, having left the salmon in charge of the strange boy, with a caution that, if he allowed the fish to be the least burnt in any one spot, he should lose his head as the penalty. They then fell fast asleep. During the process of cooking, and before they awoke, a spark flew from the fire which burned a blister on the fish. Fionn

[33] This summary is that of Nicholas O'Kearney. See *OS*, II (1854), 174, note 2.

[34] "Boghman" is undoubtedly the "Bodbmall" of the *Macgnímartha Finn* and the "Bodball Bendron" of the *Fotha Catha Cnucha*. A story preserved in modern Irish tradition relates that, to escape from his enemies, the seven year old Fionn picked up Boghmuin, slung her over his shoulders, and fled. When he reached the seacoast at Lurgan Green, he found that he had only the *lurgain* (shin-bones) of his foster-mother, which he held in his hand. These he cast into the sea, and Lurgan Green has ever since been called "Lurgain Ratha" in Irish. For this story, see *OS*, II (1854), 32.

became so terrified at what had happened, that he applied his thumb to the scorched part in the hope of settling it down, so that it should not be perceived by his employers; but the heat of the blister burned his thumb, which he thrust into his mouth to relieve the pain. No sooner had he done so, than he became gifted with fore-science —for it was the Salmon of Knowledge which he had been cooking—and he learned that the king of Tara, seven years before, had expressly dispatched the fishermen in quest of the salmon, in order to discover where he (Fionn himself) had taken refuge, that he might take his life. He made his escape before the fishermen awoke; and it was by these means his thumb became possessed of the power of communicating to him the knowledge of future events."[35]

[35] Other stories from modern Irish tradition present different explanations of the origin of Finn's power.

According to one version, a fairy man owned a fountain of such magic properties that, if one vessel of its water was drunk, it conferred the power of divination on him who drank. The three daughters of the fairy man were wont to sell the water. One day Finn and two companions approached the fountain, and a fairy woman, in order to stay their approach, splashed them with water. Part of it went into their mouths, and they were thereafter possessed of the power of foresight.

Another of these stories tells that a fairy man supplied Finn and his two companions with drink from a golden vessel, which gave them foresight and true wisdom. As the vessel was being passed to another member of Finn's party, it sprang out of the man's hand and, falling to the earth, was swallowed up. Twigs of wood grew up in the spot where the vessel sank into the earth, and whosoever, if he were fasting, beheld these twigs in the morning became possessed of foreknowledge of all the events of that day.

The two tales here noted appear as episodes in the late Ossianic frame-story *Feis Tighe Chonain Chinn-Shleibhe,* which according to D'Arbois, *Essai,* p. 131, is preserved in thirteen manuscripts, the oldest dating from 1702. *Feis Tighe Chonain Chinn-Shleibhe* has been edited and translated by N. O'Kearney, *OS,* II (1854), 118 ff. For these two tales concerning Finn, see *ibid.,* pp. 173 and 175 ff.

A tale from Scottish oral tradition, "How the Een was Set Up," is very similar to the Irish story outlined above.[36] The episode relating to the salmon of knowledge may be summarized thus:

> Because of enmity against Cumhal, the king gave orders that Cumhal's posthumous son, Fionn, should be slain. A prophet had predicted that Fionn would come, and that no trout would be taken from a certain river in "Eirinn" until Fionn arrived. Fionn came and met Black Arcan, the man who had killed Cumhal, fishing on the river. Fionn asked Black Arcan to try to get a trout for him. The fisherman did so, and a trout was killed. Then Black Arcan knew that the man was Fionn, the son of Cumhal. Fionn asked for the fish, and Black Arcan gave it to him. In cooking the fish he burned a spot upon it. Fionn put his finger upon the black spot that came upon the trout and in so doing burned his finger. He thereupon put his finger into his mouth. "Then he got knowledge that it was this Black Arcan who had slain his father, and unless he should slay Black Arcan in his sleep, that Black Arcan would slay him when he should awake."

A variant of the episode of the burned finger, peculiar in that it seems to attribute the source of Finn's power rather to a tooth of wisdom than to a wisdom-giving salmon, is also preserved in Scottish oral tradition.[37] In this tale the incident concerning Finn's burning his finger on the cooking fish is used merely as a

[36] This summary is made from the story edited by J. F. Campbell, *Popular Tales of the West Highlands,* III, new edition, London, 1892, pp. 348 ff. Cf. Henderson, *The Celtic Review,* I (1904-5), 355 ff., 360.

[37] See J. G. Campbell, *The Fians,* London, 1891, pp. 19 ff.

medium to bring about the accidental discovery of the magic tooth. A summary of the episode follows:

> Fionn went to the river and there met a fisherman who had caught a salmon. The fisherman told Fionn to cook the salmon, warning him, however, that he should allow no blister to be burned upon it. Fionn saw a blister arising. He put his hand upon the blister in order to press it down. In so doing he burned his finger. He thereupon put his finger into his mouth. Thus he became acquainted with his wisdom tooth, which, when pressed with his finger, gave him the power of solving questions.

Although throughout the corpus of Irish and Scottish tales regarding Finn the divining power and the abilities acquired through its possession remain constant and are taken as constituent parts of Finn's character, both the ancient Irish stories and the modern Irish and Scottish tales show some variance regarding details of the operation employed in making this divining power active. According to one modern Irish story, Finn "chewed his thumb from the flesh to the bone, from the bone to the marrow, from the marrow to the quick," whereupon he became possessed of the divining power.[88] Another modern Irish story records that Finn called for a chess-board and some water. Then, having washed his hands, he put his thumb under his tooth of know-

[88] J. Curtin, *Hero-Tales of Ireland,* London, 1894, pp. 451, 474, and 533. See also Meyer, *Anecdota Oxoniensia, Med. and Mod. Series,* I, iv (1885), xvii. O'Curry's story relating to Finn's smashing his thumb as the result of an adventure with a fairy woman states that Finn's gift of divination was present only when he "bruised or chewed" the thumb between his teeth. As has been indicated above, Chapter I, note 18, it appears not improbable that, in making his résumé of the story preserved in the ancient text, O'Curry inserted from modern tradition certain details connected with the incitation of the divining power which were not present in his source.

ledge.[39] According to another account "Finn put his thumb in his mouth and chewed it tightly between his teeth," whereupon he became aware of what had been unknown to him.[40] The inciting operations most commonly found in modern Irish tradition, however, limit the process to the mere insertion of the thumb in the mouth,[41] or under the tooth of knowledge.[42] With a difference that a finger instead of the thumb is employed in the operation, this latter process is the one almost universally found in Scotland.[43]

It will at once be noted that these stories from oral tradition differ in certain fundamental features from the version preserved in the *Macgnímartha Finn.* In the tales from oral tradition the king seems to be the person who is seeking Finn's life, while in the *Mac-*

[39] P. W. Joyce, *Old Celtic Romances,* 2d ed., London, 1894, p. 339. Joyce's version of *The Pursuit of Dermat and Grania,* in which this incident occurs, is based on the tale preserved in a MS, *RIA,* 23 *G* 21, written by O'Longan in 1795, and on the text edited by S. H. O'Grady, *OS,* III (1855), 40 ff. O'Grady's text is in turn derived from two MSS, one written in 1780 by Labhras O'Fuarain, the other in 1842-3 by Martan O'Griobhtha. See O'Grady's edition, *op. cit.,* p. 181, for the account of the process of divination in which the chess-board is employed.

[40] This statement is preserved in the poem *Seilg Ghleanna an Smóil,* ed. and trans. by John O'Daly, *OS,* VI (1858), 79. O'Daly, *op. cit.,* p. xv, gives as a source of the poem either a manuscript written by Laurence Foran in 1780 or a collection made by Martin Griffin in 1844. On the basis of these data the poem is treated as belonging to modern tradition.

[41] N. O'Kearney, *OS,* II (1854), 175, note 2. Cf. Joyce, *op. cit.,* p. 440.

[42] *OS,* III (1855), 189. Cf. Joyce, *op. cit.,* pp. 194, 441. The operation as described in stories edited by Joyce seems to be a painful one. For other accounts of Finn's use of the thumb of knowledge, see L. C. Stern, *RC,* XIII (1892), 16, and note. For a bibliography on the subject, see Tom Peete Cross, *Modern Philology,* X (1912-13), 295, note 2.

[43] J. G. Campbell, *The Fians,* London, 1891, pp. 20, 168, 197. Cf. Henderson, *The Celtic Review,* II (1905-6), 14, note.

gnímartha Finn, Finn's deadly enemies appear to be the son of Urgriu and the sons of Morna. According to Gilla in Chomded's poem, Finn went to learn poetry from Cethern mac Fintan because of his fear of "sword-fierce Conn," and in "Almu I," Cumall appears to be opposed to Cond, the high-king of Ireland. None of the tales from oral tradition, moreover, contains any suggestion that Finn ate the salmon, or that Finn's going to the Boyne or his actions there were in any way connected with the production of poetry or the magic incantations *imbas forosna, teinm laida,* or *dichetal do chennaib.* On the whole, the version preserved in oral tradition seems to be a more consistent story *motif;* and one is tempted to wonder whether these tales from oral tradition may not preserve a more primitive form than that which appears in the literary text of the *Macgnímartha Finn.* In the face of these facts it appears extremely unlikely that the stories of the salmon of knowledge from oral tradition have their origin in the episode in the *Macgnímartha Finn.* On the other hand, it appears not improbable that the tales from oral tradition preserve a form of the story similar to that in which both the episode in the *Macgnímartha Finn* and the oral stories had their origins.

What, then, may be said of the origin and development of the *Macgnímartha Finn?* The *Fotha Catha Cnucha* is a tale which evidently has been built up through the fusing of two stories. One of these is reflected in "Almu I"; the other, which probably contained the seven stanzas concerning Goll, is apparently preserved or reflected in the *Macgnímartha Finn.* There is reason to believe, however, that the *Macgnímartha*

Finn as it now stands resulted from a blending and reworking of different stories about the youthful Finn. One of these tales, which obviously underlies Gilla in Chomded's poem, must have included episodes relating to the feud between Finn and the sons of Morna, episodes respecting boyish deeds similar to those related of Cuchulinn, the slaying of "Glonna" and the recovery of the treasure bag, and the story of Finn's killing of Aed, the son of Fidga. Other episodes preserved in the *Macgnímartha Finn* were in all probability constituent parts of the tale on which Gilla in Chomded's poem was based, although, unfortunately, it seems impossible to determine what these may have been. The allusions to the "sons of Morna" (Strophe 2), however, and later to "sword-fierce Conn" (Strophe 8) would suggest a tale which was in some respects similar to that preserved in the *Fotha Catha Cnucha.*

It has been noted above that in the *Macgnímartha Finn* there appear to be two different characters called the Grey One of Luachair; that there seems to be a duplication of episodes in Finn's going to Finnéces and later to Cethern in order to learn poetry; and that the episode concerning the salmon of knowledge exhibits inconsistencies which appear to stamp it as the literary development of a story which originally was similar to the legend of the salmon of knowledge preserved in Irish and Scottish oral tradition. Although Gilla in Chomded, in all probability, did not include in his poem every episode contained in the tale which it reflects, it appears not unlikely that the source of the episode of the salmon of knowledge preserved in the *Macgnímartha Finn* was something other than the tradition

which formed a basis for Gilla in Chomded's poem. It also seems probable that the story which forms the first four sections of the *Macgnímartha Finn,* in which Finn is called Demne and which includes the poem about Goll, as well as the episodes further along in the text which concern Demne's having become a scald (Section 14) and his association with the blacksmith (Section 15), constituted part of the tale on which Gilla in Chomded's work is based. T'ese episodes, as well as that concerning the salmon of knowledge, may have been parts of a tale relating to the boyish deeds of Finn, which the composer of the *Macgnímartha Finn* blended with other versions of the same story. Again, they may have been independent tales about Finn, or some one else, which the composer fitted into his work —a compilation made up from various sources—or, on the other hand, they may have been invented by the composer of the *Macgnímartha Finn.*

After a careful investigation of the *Macgnímartha Finn* and related tales, Brown, in his study noted above,[44] arrives at the following conclusions:[45]

> *"M* [*Macgnímartha Finn*] owes its preservation, no doubt, to the fact that it was told as heroic saga and was made a part of the supposed history of Finn. In the process of adapting it to history the marvelous elements out of which it has been built up have become obscured, but a little study of it will reveal that it belonged originally to the group of *enfances féeriques."*

And, again:[46]

[44] A. C. L. Brown, "The Grail and the English 'Sir Perceval,'" *Modern Philology,* XVIII (1920-21), 201 ff. See also note 14, *supra.*

[45] *Op. cit.,* p. 211.

[46] *Ibid.,* pp. 223 ff.

"*M* [*Macgnímartha Finn*] has, evidently, been unskilfully patched together out of two independent accounts, thus introducing two characters called 'The Grey One of Luachair.' The first is a woman (§4). The second is the warrior 'who dealt the first wound to Cumall in the battle of Cnucha' (§16). The warrior did not belong in the first of these accounts. He is not mentioned in (§2) along with Finn's other enemies in the battle, only an obscure phrase ('the man who kept Cumall's treasure-bag,' etc.) referring to him has been inserted. In the same way two characters called Aed, both enemies to Finn, have arisen. The first Aed (the son of Daire the Red) is said to be the same as Goll mac Morna; the second Aed (the son of Fidga) is a fairy antagonist.

"After the first few paragraphs Goll disappears from *M*. This first part of *M* doubtless comes from an annalistic source resembling the *Fotha Catha*, but differing from it in having no mention of Conn. The second part of *M* comes from something pretty close to a folk-tale. This source (*X*), which had some literary connection with the source of *Sp* ['Sir Perceval'], made Aed the chief enemy to Finn, and had little to say of Goll—that is, it was like Gilla in Chomded's poem, which does not mention Goll, although it refers to the 'sons of Morna.' "

Continuing, Brown asserts:[47]

"What was the character of *X*, the common original of *Sp* ['Sir Perceval'] and *M* [*Macgnímartha Finn*]? One or two passages which have been discussed above, where traces of a similar working up of an incident appear both in English and Irish, do not prove that *X* had developed far beyond the folk-lore stage. It

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 224.

was essentially a folk-tale because it preserved for the most part the original motivation. 'Folk-tales do not leave the point of the story in the dark. Their hearers object to puzzles.'[48] As far as the *enfances* framework is concerned, *X* closely resembled *M*, the main difference being that *M* omits supernatural features, most of which have left traces in *Sp*. It is for this reason that *Sp* cannot come from *M*, and since *M* is too old to come from *Sp*, both must go back to a common source, *X*."

Having pointed out that "Sir Perceval" and its related stories lack adequate motivation for the secrecy concerning the hero's name, Brown calls attention to the fact that in the *Macgnímartha Finn* the reason for this secrecy is perfectly clear, viz., the son of Urgriu and the sons of Morna were watching to kill him, and he concludes that *X* was practically a folk-tale, the main thread of its plot being well preserved in the *Macgnímartha Finn*.

A review of the points considered earlier in this chapter would seem to lead to a conclusion closely in accord with the views expressed by Brown, and may be stated as follows: The *Macgnímartha Finn* has been patched together from two independent accounts.[49] One of

[48] Brown here quotes G. L. Kittredge, *A Study of Gawain and the Green Knight*, Cambridge, 1916, p. 249.

[49] See Alfred Nutt, *Folk-Lore Record*, IV (1881), 19, who may be quoted as follows: "A proof that the compiler of the Boyish Exploits had different and independent versions of the story before him is found in Fionn's adventure with Liath Luachra, which calls so strikingly to mind Conall's connection with Lagh an Laidh, as indeed an analogy has already been noticed between the two. Another Liath Luachra appears earlier in the story; a druidess, however, and instructress of the hero. Confusion has evidently arisen from the unskillful piecing together of two stories, and this confusion has nearly effaced two important incidents, the rearing of the hero by a

these is the story which is reflected in and forms part of the basis of the *Fotha Catha Cnucha.* This tale evidently concerned the death of Cumall and the later life of the youthful Finn under the menace of his father's enemies; and it may even have been an annalistic development from Brown's *X.* The other account is probably the folk-tale which Brown has designated *X,* and which is reflected not only in the *Macgnímartha Finn* but also in Gilla in Chomded's poem. This *X* is undoubtedly related in some manner to the *Macgnímrada Conculaind.*

Which, if either, of these sources of the *Macgnímartha Finn* contained the episode concerning the salmon of knowledge is quite unknown. As has been noted above, it is not reflected in Gilla in Chomded's poem, where Finn goes to Cethern mac Fintan to learn "noble poetry." Moreover, the *Macgnímartha Finn* seems to have a duplication of *motifs* in that Finn goes to Finnéces and later to Cethern for the purpose of learning poetry. These facts point toward a conjecture that the episode of the salmon of knowledge was not present in the story which formed the basis of Gilla in Chomded's poem, and that the apparent duplication of *motifs* in the *Macgnímartha Finn* resulted from an awkward fitting of this episode into a story of which it was not a part. On the other hand, the facts that in the tales from oral tradition the person for whom Finn cooks the fish is an agent of the king (or of powerful enemies), and that in these stories Finn's

druidess, whom he afterward kills, like Peredur, and like Fionn in 'How the Een was set up,' and the slaying by the hero, as in the latter story, and as in the English Perceval, of the man who killed (or first wounded) his father."

life is sought because of enmity against his father, Cumall, arouse a suspicion that the annalistic tale reflected in the first part of the *Macgnímartha Finn* and used as a partial basis of the *Fotha Catha Cnucha* may have been the source of the episode of the burned finger in the fifteenth-century text. Altogether, the evidence seems insufficient to justify any kind of conclusion on this point. The episode may have been included in either or both of these sources, viz., the source of Gilla in Chomded's poem, and the annalistic tale reflected in the first part of the *Macgnímartha Finn.* Again, it may have been included in neither of them, being merely a floating story about Finn which the composer of the *Macgnímartha Finn* knew and incorporated in his work. In support of this last possibility it will be recalled that Sections 17-21 of the fifteenth-century tale seem to show a number of inconsistencies. First, as has just been noted, Finn's going to Finnéces and to Cethern to learn poetry prompts a guess that the episode was awkwardly fitted into a story of which it was not a part. Moreover, there seems to be an inconsistency in the episode of the salmon of knowledge, as it is recorded in the *Macgnímartha Finn,* in that *after* eating the salmon of knowledge Finn was obliged to insert his thumb in his mouth. This feature does not appear in the versions from oral tradition, which never suggest that the episode of the salmon of knowledge is in any way connected with Finn's learning of poetry or with the magic incantations *imbas forosna, teinm laida,* and *dichetal do chennaib,* which apparently formed part of the poet's stock in trade. Altogether, it appears not improbable that the narrative preserved in Sections 17-21 of the *Macgnímartha Finn* is a literary presentation of materi-

als from various sources which have been worked over, modified, and fitted together in such a way as to suit the fancy of some composer, possibly the author of the *Macgnímartha Finn* or possibly some earlier story-teller, whose work, with much or little modification, was united with other sources in the construction of the *Macgnímartha Finn.* The inconsistencies which appear in these sections, however, will be treated in a subsequent chapter.

The source of the episode of the salmon of knowledge, therefore, as recorded in the *Macgnímartha Finn,* remains a question; and the age of the tradition from which the episode seems to be a development is likewise uncertain. That the legend is much older than the date of the *Macgnímartha Finn* appears altogether probable. In his well-known study, "The Aryan Expulsion-and-Return-Formula," Alfred Nutt, having called attention to the episode of the salmon of knowledge in a number of stories about Finn, as well as to Taliesin's acquisition of supernatural knowledge through the inadvertent tasting of a magic liquid, makes the following assertion:[50]

[50] *Folk-Lore Record,* IV (1881), 36. Nutt's study, "The Aryan Expulsion-and-Return-Formula in the Folk and Hero Tales of the Celts," is a work supplementary to the ingenious theory presented by J. G. von Hahn, who pointed out that certain hero tales found among various branches of the Aryan race are alike in that a number of fundamental incidents in these stories seem to be common to all. On the basis of this evidence von Hahn set forth his "Arische Aussetzungs-und Ruckkehr-Formel" (*Sagwissenschaftliche Studien,* Jena, 1876, pp. 340 ff.), which postulates an Aryan story-formula as a foundation on which certain tales existing in different branches of the Aryan race had been built up, and which served as an explanation of the similar incidents found in these stories. To the sixteen typic incidents included in von Hahn's formula, Nutt, after examining a number of Celtic stories which, in the main, seem

"The magic fish (salmon or trout) appears so prominently in the Ossianic version of the formula that, even if the incident were found in none of the variants, there would be enough to warrant its insertion among the type incidents. And when such close and interesting variants are found as in the present and in the Siegfried stories such insertion becomes a matter of necessity."

Apparently, Nutt would have assigned not only the episode of the salmon of knowledge but also those concerning Finn's dealings with the smith, the smith's daughter, and the killing of the sow, to a very ancient stratum of Irish stories.[51] Furthermore, Brown has shown that certain other incidents of the *Macgnímartha Finn,* notably Finn's military service with the kings of Bantry and Kerry (Sections 13-14), which do not appear in Gilla in Chomded's poem, are found in the English "Sir Perceval" and must, therefore, trace their origin to the very ancient tale which was the common source of the *Macgnímartha Finn* and "Sir Perceval."[52] Pace is apparently in accord with this conclusion.[53]

to be in agreement with the formula, added two, viz., that the hero attacks and slays a monster, and that he acquires supernatural knowledge through eating a magic fish. Nutt's inclusion of the salmon of knowledge in the story-formula is based in large measure on the appearance of that incident in Irish and Scottish tales and on the fact that an episode relating to a burned finger is found in stories which concern the Norse Sigurd and the Welsh Taliesin.

[51] This conclusion is based upon the fact that Nutt includes the incident relating to the acquisition of knowledge through the eating of a magic fish and that which concerns the slaying of a monster among the typic incidents of his Celtic story-formula. See *Folk-Lore Record,* IV (1881), 18, and note 50, *supra.*

[52] *Modern Philology,* XVIII (1920-21), 219 ff.

[53] *PMLA,* XXXII (1917), 603 ff.

Although in some respects Nutt's views, particularly those concerning the stories of Taliesin and Sigurd,[54] may be open to question,[55] it appears highly probable, as Nutt seems to infer, that the story of Finn's acquisition of wisdom through burning his finger or thumb on the cooking salmon of knowledge existed in Irish tradition at a very ancient period. In fact, if it may be assumed that the general idea embodied in the hypothesis presented by von Hahn and supplemented by Nutt is well founded, it appears not impossible that the Irish legend of the salmon of knowledge is a development from some basic incident included in the formula. There also seems to be a possibility that the story of the salmon of knowledge had its origin in a wide-spread, primitive tradition which concerns the acquisition of strength or other powers through eating the flesh or drinking the blood of some magic animal or adversary.[56] From such a basis a *motif* may very conceivably have developed according to which a person burned a thumb or finger while cooking some magic animal and, having thrust the burned member into his mouth to ease the pain, accidentally acquired the animal's magic powers.

[54] Nutt, *op. cit.*, pp. 36 ff. See also note 50, *supra.*

[55] These points will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

[56] See discussion in Chapters VI and VII, *infra.* Even today in the United States hunters of "big game," butchers, and ignorant employees of packing houses can be found who believe that some of the strength of a powerful animal may be acquired by drinking its warm blood. This belief, in some degree, may be connected with the notion that the blood of an animal is a particularly nourishing food; but in large measure, it seems to be based on the primitive superstition concerning the magic transference of strength. In this connexion, see Frazer, *The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings,* I (*The Golden Bough,* Part I), 3d ed., London, 1911, 91; Axel Olrik, *The Heroic Legends of Denmark,* translated by Lee M. Hollander, New York, 1919, pp. 223 ff.; Hastings, *ERE, s.v.* "Blood."

It may also be noted in this connexion that, according to Irish tradition, the salmon is a magic fish and, like the wisdom-giving white snake (*haselwurm*) of Continental lore,[57] is associated with the hazel.

Throughout the entire corpus of Irish, if not of all Celtic literature, the hazel seems to have a magic or sacred significance. In *Cormac's Glossary* the expression *Caill crínmon* is declared to mean "hazels of scientific composition . . . . . from which is broken a new composition."[58]

A metrical *Dindshenchas,* "Sinann II," relates that the nine hazels of Crimall, the sage, are above the well of Condla beneath the ocean. "They stand by the power of magic spells under the darksome mist of

[57] According to a large group of Teutonic tales, which will be treated in a subsequent chapter, the eating of a white snake insures the understanding of bird or of animal speech. In many of these tales the white snake is known as the *haselwurm.* Wuttke (*Der deutsche Volksaberglaube der Gegenwart,* 3d ed. by E. H. Meyer, Berlin, 1900, Sec. 58) declares: "Der Haselwurm, eine kleine weisze oder bunte Schlange, wohnt unter Haselsträuchen, auf denen eine Mistel wächst, nährt sich von den Blättern des Strauchs, in deren jedes er ein rundes Loch beiszt." For data concerning the magic significance of the hazel in Teutonic tradition, see *ibid.,* Secs. 13, 20, 58, 94, 142, 196, 285, 336, 398, 483, 585, 662, 700, and 711.

[58] *Cormac's Glossary,* ed. Stokes, Calcutta, 1868, p. 35, *s.v.* "Caill crínmon." For information concerning this very ancient text, see Chapter I, note 1. For other data concerning the magic hazel in Irish lore, see C. Plummer, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae,* Oxford, I (1910), cliii-clviii, and notes; Johnson, *The Celtic Review,* III (1906-7), 341 ff., 346; Stokes, *Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore,* Oxford, 1890, p. 338; Stokes, *IT,* III, i (1891), 195, 213, and 226; Stokes, *RC,* VIII (1887), 63, and XV (1894), 457; Hartland, *The Science of Fairy Tales,* New York, 1891, pp. 120, 207, and 220. In the *Ancient Laws,* III, ed. O'Mahony and Richey, Dublin, 1873, p. 51, there is an allusion to knowledge acquired from the "*iumais*-nuts of the land of the Boyne." Compare this with the statement in *LL* (*RIA Facs.* 187a 56), "*Roascim na cnú docuridar boand .i. cnoi ind immais.*"

wizardry." When the nuts are ripe, they fall into the well, and the salmon eat them.[69] The association of the salmon and hazel in this connexion appears to be a mingling of two traditions which have their roots in the beliefs of a very remote antiquity. The curious tradition concerning the magic qualities of the hazel may be a reminiscence of a pre-Christian tree cult; and the magic salmon, likewise, may have its origin in a pagan belief concerning a sacred fish. In view of the magic significance of both the salmon and the hazel, an association of the two ideas seems to be a more or less natural consequence. Nor does it appear unreasonable to assume that the story relating to Finn and the salmon of knowledge may be an Irish evolution of primitive ideas concerning the acquisition of magic powers through eating the flesh or drinking the blood of certain animals, and that in this development the magic salmon of Irish tradition becomes the animal in question. It might then be conjectured that the *motif* of

[69] Edward Gwynn, *The Metrical Dindshenchas,* III, *RIA, TLS,* X (1913), 286 ff., 292 ff., and 529. This story is also preserved in a twelfth-century prose *Dindshenchas,* "Sinann," ed. and trans. by Whitley Stokes, *RC,* XV (1894), 456 ff. According to Stokes, *loc. cit.,* the earliest mention of the nine hazels of wisdom appears to be in the "Dialogue of the Two Sages," *LL,* 186b 37, "where Néde mac Adnai says that he has come *a caillib* .i. a nói collaib na Segsa . . . . a caillib di*diu* assa mbe*naiter* clessa na súad tanacsa 'from hazels, to wit, from the nine hazels of the Segais . . . . from hazels out of which are obtained the feats of the sages, I have come.'" See also Stokes, *IT,* III, i (1891), 213; *Folk-Lore,* III (1892), 498; *Cormac's Glossary,* ed. Stokes, Calcutta, 1868, *s.v.* "Caill crínmon," O'Donovan's note; O'Curry, *Manners and Customs,* II (1873), 143; MacCulloch, *The Childhood of Fiction,* London, 1905, p. 41, and note; *ibid.,* p. 35, note 2; MacCulloch, *The Religion of the Ancient Celts,* Edinburgh, 1911, pp. 377 ff.; L. Gwynn, *Ériu,* VII (1914), 216.

the burned finger developed in the manner indicated above.[60]

Whatever may be said regarding the antiquity of a basic story according to which Finn burns his finger on a cooking salmon of knowledge, a modified version of such a tale probably appears in the *Macgnímartha Finn,* which, although preserved only in the fifteenth-century manuscript Laud 610, was, in all probability, in existence as early as the twelfth century.[61] Consequently, it may be asserted that the story of the salmon of knowledge was present in Irish tradition before that time.

An examination of the data presented on foregoing pages of this investigation reveals the fact that even the earliest preserved Irish tradition shows great con-

[60] An attempt to explain the traditions concerning the Irish magic salmon, the magic hazel, and the association of the two ideas appears fruitless; but it seems clear that the magic salmon and the sacred well are intimately related. It also appears not improbable that the magic salmon is a development from a sacred fish cult. If, as seems not unlikely, there is a close connexion between the cults of sacred fish and sacred wells, the magic salmon, if it be a development from either form of worship, would at once appear to be a development from both. For information concerning the cults of sacred wells, fish, and trees, see MacCulloch, *The Religion of the Ancient Celts,* 1911, pp. 149, 181, 187, and 198; MacCulloch, *The Childhood of Fiction,* 1905, pp. 35, 54; Plummer, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae,* I (1910), cli ff., clviii ff.; Gomme, *Folklore as an Historical Science,* 1908, p. 290; Renel, *Les Religions de la Gaule,* Paris, 1906, pp. 155 ff., 166 ff., 177 ff.; Hastings, *ERE, s.v.* "Fish."

[61] Meyer, *Fianaigecht,* p. xxviii. For data concerning the manuscript Laud 610, see Todd, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy,* II (1840), 336 ff.; Meyer, *ZCP,* VII (1910), 524, and note; Eoin MacNeill, *ITS,* VII, i (1908), xxvi ff.; Brown, *Modern Philology,* XVIII (1920-21), 211 ff. See further Roy Bennett Pace, *PMLA,* XXXII (1917), new series XXV, 598 ff., for an excellent discussion of the date of the *Macgnímartha Finn* and a copious bibliography on the subject.

fusion not only concerning the origin of Finn's power of divination but also concerning its nature and the processes employed in making it active. Two different tales purporting to explain the origin of this power were, in all probability, extant in the ninth century. One of these attributes a magic finger to Finn as a result of his having that member smashed in the door of a fairy-knoll after a meeting with a fairy woman; but later in the same text the thumb instead of the finger seems to be imbued with magic powers. Furthermore, the operation employed in awakening the divining power, as twice described in this text, associates the placing of the thumb or finger in the mouth with the magic incantation *imbas forosna.* The second story, of which the first may be an imitation, accounts for Finn's magic thumb by having it smashed in the door of a fairy-knoll as the result of an encounter with a fairy man. This version, however, contains no allusion to *imbas forosna* or other form of magic incantation. Another ninth-century statement limits the inciting operation to the insertion of the thumb in the mouth and chanting through *teinm laida,* while yet another very early description of the inciting process associates the chanting of *teinm laida* with the insertion of the thumb under the "knowledge tooth." The twelfth-century *Macgnímartha Finn* presents a story according to which Finn's magic thumb resulted from its having been burned on the cooking salmon of knowledge. This account, however, is in partial agreement with the tale preserved in the more ancient texts in that the inciting operation consists of inserting the thumb in the mouth and chanting through *teinm laida.* As has been noted above, the tale preserved in the *Macgnímartha Finn* is apparently

a reflection of a story concerning the burned finger and the salmon of knowledge which may have been in existence in very ancient times. Prior to the twelfth century, then, two apparently unrelated tales existed in Irish tradition, one containing the episode of the smashed thumb, the other, the story of the cooking salmon, and both purporting to explain the origin of Finn's magic thumb or finger. Furthermore, descriptions of the inciting operations preserved in the different tales are at variance with respect to whether Finn inserted a finger or his thumb in his mouth. Equal confusion presents itself in connexion with the relationship of the incantations *imbas forosna* and *teinm laida* to the act of inserting the thumb or finger in the mouth, and one is tempted to wonder whether Finn's act and its reaction were regarded as an operation complete and separate from *imbas forosna* and *teinm laida,* or whether the insertion of the finger or thumb in the mouth was thought to be in some way intimately related to, or derived from, these magic practices. A further complication appears when an early description of the divining operation asserts that Finn chanted a *teinm laida* and put his thumb under his tooth of knowledge.

This apparent confusion with respect to details relating to Finn's act, together with the more or less uncertain allusions to *teinm laida* and *imbas forosna* in this connexion, at once suggests a number of questions. Did the tradition concerning Finn's thumb or finger of knowledge and the powers connected therewith have its genesis in a tale similar to that relating to the burned finger and the salmon of knowledge? Was this hypothetical tale based on the wide-spread tradition that man

became possessed of supernatural powers through eating the flesh or drinking the blood of certain animals? Did, then, the tradition of the thumb of knowledge and the powers associated with it, having become a constituent part of Finn's character, lose its connexion with the tale in which it originated and exist as a separate tradition? Were, then, the tales concerning the smashed thumb invented to explain Finn's thumb of knowledge by persons who did not know the story of the burned thumb and the cooking salmon, or did the inventors of the tales regarding the smashed thumb, knowing the story of Finn and the cooking salmon, merely create tales in imitation thereof? On the other hand, was there in existence a tradition, connected in some way with the magic practices *imbas forosna* and *teinm laida,* which attributed supernatural powers to the human hand, thumb, or fingers; and, this tradition having become attached to Finn, were these stories invented to explain it, both that which concerned the salmon of knowledge as well as those which relate to the smashed thumb or finger?

A critical examination of the magic incantations existent in ancient Irish texts thus appears to be a necessary step in any investigation of the tradition of the thumb of knowledge.

CHAPTER III
IMBAS FOROSNA, TEINM LAIDA, AND DICHETAL DO CHENNAIB

—

WHATEVER may be said concerning the nature and origin of the magic practices *imbas forosna, teinm laida,* and *dichetal do chennaib,* their employment, according to tradition, was part of the function of a *fili* or poet at a very early period.[1] A passage which must be as old as the tenth century, since it is an excerpt from the commentaries on the *Ancient Laws,* runs as follows:[2]

> "There are three things that are required of the 'ollam'-poet, i.e. 'teinm laegda' and 'imus forosnad,' and 'dichetal do chennaib,' as the 'Nemed'-Judgments say: 'three things which dignify the dignities [?] of a poet, *"tenm laegda," "imus forosnad," "dicedul du cennaib."* '
>
> " 'Teinm laegda,' that is to say, 'teinm' means shining, and 'teinm' means to understand, i.e. that he understand through his poem ['laid'] the thing which he wishes to say . . . . . .
>
> " 'Imus forosnad,' i.e. abundant knowledge of the learning *given by* the tutor to the pupil . .
>
> " 'Dichedal do chennaib,' i.e. there goes at once to him from the head of his art the common headship . . . . . ."[3]

[1] Thurneysen, *Königsage,* p. 71; D'Arbois, *Introduction à l'étude de la littérature celtique,* Paris, 1883, pp. 256 ff.; P. W. Joyce, *A Social History of Ancient Ireland,* I (1903), 433; D. Hyde, *A Literary History of Ireland,* London, 1903, p. 241.

[2] *Ancient Laws of Ireland,* ed. Atkinson, V (1901), 57 ff. Concerning the date of the *Ancient Laws* and the commentaries thereon, see D'Arbois, *RC,* XII (1891), 296 ff.

[3] O'Curry translates this last passage, i.e., the one respecting *dichetal do chennaib,* as follows: "he enters upon his poem instantly,—the common extempore, and it is said, 'because he gives information [of what is secret] without contemplation,' . . . . " See *Ancient Laws of Ireland,* ed. Atkinson, V (1901), 59, note.

It will be observed that in this excerpt the commentator includes a direct quotation from the Nemed Judgments, thus making it clear that the association of these magic practices with the poet was known and mentioned in the *Ancient Laws* long before the commentary was written, probably in the tenth century; and we note further that the commentator's etymologies are vague and uncertain. Fortunately, evidence bearing on these magic rites has been preserved in a number of very ancient documents, among which *Cormac's Glossary,* dating from the late ninth or early tenth century, is perhaps the most important.[4]

(a) *Imbas Forosna.* Concerning *imbas forosna,* Cormac may thus be quoted:[5]

> *"Imbas forosna* 'Manifestation that enlightens': (it) discovers what thing soever the poet likes and which he desires to reveal. Thus then is that done. The poet chews a piece of the red flesh of a pig, or a dog, or a cat, and puts it then on a flagstone behind the door-valve, and chants an incantation over it, and offers it to idol gods, and calls them to him, and leaves them not on the morrow, and then chants over his two palms, and calls again idol gods to him, that his sleep

[4] See Chapter I, note 1.

[5] This quotation is taken from the translation by Whitley Stokes published in his edition of the text of Laud 610, *Phil. Soc. Trans.*, 1891-94, pp. 149 ff., *s.v.* "Imbas forosna." The Laud text is probably the one nearest the original. Cf. Thurneysen, *Festschrift Ernst Windisch,* Leipzig, 1914, p. 37, and Vendryes, *RC,* XXXVII (1917-19), 368 ff. Readings from the other texts of *Cormac's Glossary* are in accord with reference to the points under discussion in this passage.

O'Donovan quotes this passage in a note, *Ancient Laws of Ireland,* I (1865), 45, as does D'Arbois, *Introduction à l'étude de la littérature celtique,* Paris, 1883, pp. 247 ff. See further Watson, *The Celtic Review,* X (1914-16), 274; Loth, *RC,* XXXVII (1917-19), 311 ff.; Hyde, *A Literary History of Ireland,* 1903, p. 84.

may not be disturbed. Then he puts his two palms on his two cheeks and sleeps. And men are watching him that he may not turn over and that no one may disturb him. And then is revealed to him that for which he was (engaged) till the end of a *nómad* (three days and nights) or two or three for the long or the short time (?) that he may judge himself (to be) at the offering. And therefore it is called *Imm-bas,* to wit, a palm (*bas*) on this side and a palm on that around his head.

"Patrick banished that and the *Tenm láida* 'illumination of song,' and declared that no one who shall do that shall belong to heaven or earth, for it is a denial of baptism. *Dichetal do chennaib* 'extempore incantation,' however, *that* was left, in right of art, for it is science that causes it, and no offering to devils is necessary, but a declaration from the ends of his bones at once."

It will be observed that in the foregoing passage Stokes translates *imbas forosnai* as "manifestation that enlightens,"[6] and also that Cormac makes the following statement regarding the etymology of the word *imbas*: "And therefore it is called *Imm-bas,* to wit, a palm (*bas*) on this side and a palm on that around his head." There can be no doubt that *bas* means 'palm,' and it is equally certain that *im* signifies 'around.' It therefore appears that "manifestation" is inadequate as a meaning for *imbas.* A better treatment is that accorded by Loth, who renders *imbas forosna* as "la jointée (l'ap-

[6] The Irish text from Laud 610, ed. Stokes, *Phil. Soc. Trans.,* 1891-94, p. 156, of the first few lines of this passage appears as follows:

"IMbas forosnai .i. dofuarascaib sechi[p]ret bas maith lasin filid 7 bas adlacc dó dofaillsigud. Is amlaid ón di*diu* dogníther ón .i. concná infili . . . . . ."

plication des deux paumes) qui éclaire."[7] In close agreement with the idea set forth by Loth, Dunn translates the expression "illumination between the hands."[8]

Allusions to *imbas forosna* in texts entirely unrelated to those cited above are sufficiently numerous to justify

[7] J. Loth, *RC*, XXXVII (1917-19), 311 ff. Concerning the explanation of *imbas forosnæ* preserved in *Cormac's Glossary*, Loth states: "Il est évident que les souvenirs du narrateur sont quelque peu incohérents. Mais un fait est acquis, c'est que l'*application des deux paumes* est l'opération essentielle; c'est elle qui amène le sommeil pendant lequel le *fili* recevra les révélations qu'il attend. Le texte d'ailleurs est formel: le rite est appelé *imbas* à cause *de l'application des deux paumes*. Les deux paumes, sans aucun doute, à l'origine étaient jointes, se rejoignaient. On peut supposer aussi qu'elles devaient recouvrir les yeux: la révélation ne se fait d'ailleurs que lorsque le sommeil les a clos. C'est ce que l'appellation *imbas forosnai* (la jointée—qui ferme les yeux—mais qui illumine) a voulu faire ressortir. *Imbas* suppose la forme vieille-goidélique *embibostu* comme *ambosta*=*ambi-bosta*. La forme continentale est gauloise pure. Il se pourrait que l'extension extraordinaire du mot *ambosta* ait été due au rôle en quelque sorte liturgique, religieux, que cette *jointée* a joué chez les anciens Celtes. Il semble qu'on soit ici en présence d'une sorte d'opération de magnétisme ou de spiritisme."

[8] J. Dunn, *The Táin Bó Cúalnge*, London, 1914, p. 15, note. See also MacCulloch, *The Religion of the Ancient Celts*, Edinburgh, 1911, p. 248. Thurneysen, *Königsage*, p. 71, indicates an uncertainty concerning the meaning of *imbas*, and explains *"imbas forosndai"* as "das Wissen [?], das aufhellt." For a discussion of *imbas* and *ambosta*, see Loth, *op. cit.*, pp. 311 ff., and Du Cange (*Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis*, ed. L. Favre, Niort, 1884-87, 1, 218), who quotes Stat. Taurin. anno 1360, cap. 269: *"Venditores grani et leguminum de Taurino non teneantur dare Ambostas."* Du Cange further quotes Charta eccl. Lugdun. anno 1345: *"Debet quinque bichetos et quinque Ambotas frumenti."* See also J. Jud, *Rev. Filol. Espan.*, 7 (1920), 339-50, who cites (pp. 341-2), Span., *ambuesta;* Aragonese, *amosta, mosta,* 'cantidad de cereal o harina que cabe entre las dos manos juntas formando cazoleta'; Barbastro, *ambostada;* Andalusian, *embozá;* Salamancan, *embueza;* Asturian, *ambozada;* Old Dauphinese, *ambostaes;* Lyonnese, *emboto, imboto* 'ce que l'on peut saisir avec la main.' Jud holds (p. 345) that **ambibosta* (*ta*) would mean 'lo que puede cogerse con las dos manos.' The Rom. *ambosta,* Gaul. *ambi-bosta,* seems to mean 'hollow hand full.'

the conclusion that the ancient Irish believed it to be a thoroughly credited process of divination forming a part of the poet's stock in trade. One of the oldest texts containing evidences of saga-material, the *Verba Scáthaige,* preserves the following passage: *con·eipirt friss tria imbass for·ossna* ('so that she said to him through *imbas forosna*'), a statement which is immediately followed by an obscure "rhetoric" uttered by Scáthach to Co*n*Cl (Cuchulinn) concerning the Táin Bó Cúailnge.[9]

According to a passage in the *Táin,* the poetess Fedelm informed Medb that she had learned the art of poetry and *imbas forosna* in Albion. Through her skill in the latter she looked into the future for Medb and said concerning Medb's army, "I see it reddened. I see it red."[10]

Closely allied to the *imbas forosna* is the *tarb feis* 'bull sleep,' a form of divination also described in very ancient documents. According to these texts, a bull, a white one according to *LU,*[11] is killed. A man eats his fill of the flesh and broth and goes to sleep. Four

[9] For texts, see Thurneysen, *ZCP,* IX (1913), 487, and Meyer, *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts,* V (1913), 28. Scáthach was "offenbar ein dämonisches Wesen," the female instructor of Cuchulinn in feats of arms. This text is probably as old as the first half of the eighth century. On the date, see Thurneysen, from whom the quotation concerning Scáthach is taken, *Königsage,* pp. 376-7. See further *ZCP,* III (1901), 255.

[10] Thurneysen, *Königsage,* p. 120. For various versions of the *Táin bó Cúailnge* and discussion concerning them, see *ibid.,* pp. 96 ff. Cf. Dunn, *The Ancient Irish Epic Tale Táin Bó Cúalnge,* 1914, pp. xxxii ff. and 14 ff.; Windisch, *Táin Bó Cúalnge,* 1905, pp. I ff., 28-39.

For other occurrences of the term *imbas forosna* in ancient texts, see *Phil. Soc. Trans.,* 1891-4, p. 196, note.

[11] *RIA Facs.,* p. 46a 19.

druids chant *ór firindi* 'gold of truth' over him,[17] and he sees in vision the man who should be king, etc.[18]

(b) *Teinm Laida.* As has been pointed out above, *Cormac's Glossary* preserves a definite description of

[17] Thurneysen, *Königsage,* p. 421, translates *ór firindi* by "gold of truth." That the Irish *ór* means 'gold' seems certain; but one is tempted to wonder whether the word *ór* in the expression *ór firindi* might not be in some way related to the indeclinable *ol* 'speak,' 'says,' and the phrase *ór firindi* have some such meaning as 'voice of truth' or 'speech of truth.' *Cormac's Glossary* (Laud 610 text) states: *"Oar .i. guth,"* while the *LB* text adds *"no gairm."* See Stokes, *Phil. Soc. Trans.,* 1891-4, p. 174. See also Windisch, *IT,* I (1880), 213, 714, 723; H. Pedersen, *Vergleichende Grammatik der keltischen Sprachen,* Göttingen, I (1909), 273, and II (1913), 141; D'Arbois, *L'Épopée celtique en Irlande,* Paris, 1892, p. 188; Stokes, *RC,* XXII (1901), 22-23; Thurneysen, *Handbuch des Alt-Irischen,* Heidelberg, I (1909), 509.

[18] This description of the *tarb feis* forms part of the *Serglige Conculaind,* a tale found in *LU* which appears to have been copied from the Yellow Book of Slane. It has been edited by Windisch, *IT,* I (1880), 205 ff. For the description of the *tarb feis,* see Windisch, *op. cit.,* p. 213. Thurneysen thinks the *tarb feis* episode was a later insertion in the original story. For data concerning manuscript, text, datings, and development of the tale, together with information relating to editions and translations, see Thurneysen, *Königsage,* pp. 413 ff. Cf. D'Arbois, *L'Épopée celtique en Irlande,* Paris, 1892, pp. 173 ff. Windisch, *op. cit.,* p. 200, and Thurneysen, *op. cit.,* p. 421, give short summaries of the description from the text of *LU.* D'Arbois, *op. cit.,* pp. 187 ff., prints a French translation of Windisch's text, and Miss Eleanor Hull, *The Cuchullin Saga,* London, 1898, p. 232, supplies a version of the episode in English.

Another short description of the *tarb feis* occurs in the story *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga,* edited by Stokes, *RC,* XXII (1901), 22 ff., on the basis of texts from a number of manuscripts. That part in which the description of the *tarb feis* appears is taken from the Yellow Book of Lecan, which, according to Thurneysen, *op. cit.,* p. 623, "glücklicherweise dem ursprünglichen Wortlaut sehr getreu geblieben ist." *Togail bruidne Ui Dergae,* in some form, evidently existed in the eighth-century Book of Druim Snechta, and it appears probable that the episode relating to the *tarb feis* was contained in the original text. For a full discussion of the manuscripts, texts, datings, and development of the story, see Thurneysen, *op. cit.,* pp. 621 ff.

a magic practice which Cormac thought to be *imbas forosna.* Unfortunately, ancient texts fail to describe *teinm laida* so specifically, although the following passage from the *Ancient Laws* supplies a tenth-century commentator's understanding of it:[24]

> "The chief poet, i.e. the learned poet who explains or exhibits the great extent of his knowledge (i. e. who tests his knowledge) by composing a quatrain without thinking, i.e. without studying . . . . At this day it is by the ends of his bones *he effects it,* and he discovers the name by this means. And the way in which it is done is this:—When the poet sees the person or thing before him, he makes a verse at once with the ends of his fingers, or in his mind without studying, and he composes and repeats at the same time. And this is after *the reception* of the New Testament; but this is not the way it was *done* before Patrick's time, but the poet placed his staff upon the person's body or upon his head, and found out his name, and the name of his father and mother, and discovered every unknown thing that was proposed to him, in a minute or two or three; and this is Teinm Laegha, or Imus Forosna, for the same thing used to be revealed by means of them; but they were performed after a different manner, i.e. a different kind of offering was made at each.
>
> "But Patrick abolished these three things among the poets when they believed, as they were profane rites, for the Teinm Laegha and Imus Forosna could not be performed by them without offering to idol gods. He did not leave them after this any rite in which offering should be made to the devil, for their profession was pure. And he left them after this extempora-

[24] *Ancient Laws of Ireland,* I (1865), text and trans. by O'Donovan, ed. by Hancock and O'Mahony, 43 ff.

neous recital [*dichetal do chennaib*], because it was acquired through great knowledge and application;" etc.

Although the commentator seems to be much confused as to the nature of these magic rites, several statements in this passage are significant. He describes a form of divination performed through the medium of a poet's staff, and declares that it is "Teinm Laegha, or Imus Forosna," though his consciousness that "they were performed after a different manner" suggests that they may have been more divergent than he states. His description of the form of divination which did not come under the prohibition of Saint Patrick and his account of Patrick's abolition of *imbas forosna* and *teinm laida* agree with the statements preserved in Cormac's discussion of *imbas forosna* quoted above,[15] even though Cormac does not subscribe to the commentator's definition of *imbas forosna*. The commentator's consciousness that *"imus forosna"* and *"teinm laegha"* were performed "after a different manner," and his flimsy explanation of this difference, together with Cormac's full description of *imbas forosna,* suggest that the commentator knew two names and one method, and that the method was not *imbas forosna,* but *teinm laida*. Two additional passages in *Cormac's Glossary* make the identification of *teinm laida* more

[15] See note 5, above, and text. Although the commentator may have been familiar with the passage preserved in *Cormac's Glossary,* it appears rather unlikely. Cormac does not explain *teinm laida* as a rod-divination, nor does the commentator appear to have knowledge of Cormac's description of *imbas forosna.*

nearly certain. The first of these may be summarized as follows:[16]

> Lugaid, a blind poet, came to Bangor. His people, having gone to the strand of Inver Béce, found there a bare skull. This skull they brought to Lugaid and asked him whose head it was. Lugaid told them to put the end of the poet's wand upon it. This was done *"et dixit* Lugaid the Poet: 'The tempestuous water, the waters of [leg. or] the whirlpool destroyed Breccán. This is the head of Breccán's dog; and it is little of great,' said he, 'for Breccán was drowned with his people in that whirlpool.' "

The second passage likewise concerns the identification of a lapdog's skull, that part of the narrative which relates to *teinm laida* being as follows:[17]

> "Now the lapdog died, and long afterwards Connlae, son of Tadg, son of Cian, son of Ailill Bare-ear, found the bare skull of the lapdog, and took it as a puzzle to the poet who had come with a eulogy to his father. Moen, son of Etna, was that poet's name. Then the poet solved it by *tenm láido* 'illumination of song,' and said *'Cain tonna,* etc., Thou wast dear in the house of Coirpre Musc, O Mugh-éme.' This, says he, 'is the head of Mugh-éme, the first lapdog that was brought into Ireland.' "

As is at once apparent, both of these passages from

[16] *Cormac's Glossary,* trans. by O'Donovan, ed. by Stokes, Calcutta, 1868, *s.v.* "Coire Breccáin." Since the fragment of the *Glossary* in Laud 610 begins with *Imbas forosna,* this passage is not included therein. *YBL* and *Hy Maine* are in accord with this text concerning the use of the poet's wand. See Chapter I, note 1, for manuscripts and editions of *Cormac's Glossary.* This passage is also printed in part by O'Donovan in a note, *Ancient Laws,* I (1865), 44, note 1.

[17] Stokes's translation from Laud 610, *Phil. Soc. Trans.,* 1891-94, *s.v.* "Mugh-éme." The *YBL, Leabhar Breac,* and *Hy Maine* texts give no additional information concerning the poet's method.

Cormac concern the identification of a dog through the medium of the skull. The first passage indicates that the poet placed his wand on the skull and then uttered a "rhetoric," though *teinm laida* is not mentioned. The second passage tells nothing of the process, but states that the identification was accomplished through *"tenm láido."* The similarity of the two passages suggests the conclusion that both refer to the same form of divination, and that one describes the process while the other merely names it. In the light of these two citations, together with the commentator's statements and Cormac's full description of *imbas forosna,* it seems probable that *teinm laida* was, according to tenth-century tradition, a form of divination performed with the aid of a poet's wand.[18]

(c) *Dichetal do Chennaib.* The third form of divination which seems to have been required of the poet is that known as *dichetal do chennaib,* concerning which rite Cormac states:[19]

[18] A somewhat different form of rod-divination is mentioned in the version of *Tochmarc Etáine,* preserved in the manuscript Egerton 1782 and edited by Windisch, *IT,* I (1880), 113 ff. The passage in question occurs on page 129 and reads: *"Ba tromm imorro laissin druid dicheilt Etáiniu fair fri re bliadna, co n-dernui iarsin IIII flescca ibir ocus scripuidh oghumm inntib, ocus foillsighthir do triana eochraib écsi ocus triana oghumm, i. Etain do bith i sith Breg Leith iarna breth do Midir inn."* According to this account the druid made four wands of yew and wrote an *"oghumm,"* an inscription in the Old Irish alphabet, on them. It was then revealed to him through his "keys of poetry" and through his *"oghumm"* that Etain was in the fairy-knoll of Brí Léith.

This is certainly not the rod-divination discussed above. In this connexion, see Plummer, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae,* Oxford, I (1910), clx, note 5.

[19] This quotation is taken from Stokes's translation of the text of *Cormac's Glossary* in Laud 610, *Phil. Soc. Trans.,* 1891-94, pp. 156-7, *s.v.* "Imbas forosna." The Irish text for this passage is as follows:

> "*Dichetal do chennaib* 'extempore incantation,' however, *that* was left, in right of art, for it is science that causes it, and no offering to devils is necessary, but a declaration from the ends of his bones at once."[20]

The commentary on the *Ancient Laws,* quoted above,[21] declares:

> "The chief poet, i.e. the learned poet who explains or exhibits the great extent of his knowledge (i.e. who tests his knowledge) by composing a quatrain without thinking, i.e. without studying . . . . . At this day it is by the ends of his bones *he effects it,* and he discovers the name by this means. And the way in which it is done is this:—When the poet sees the per-

"Dichetal dochendaib immo*rro* i cor*us* cherdae fo*r*acbad son, ar issoas fot*e*ra son, 7 nihecen audpairt do demnaib occu, acht aisnéis dichendaib achnáme fochétoir."

[20] In his edition of the *Glossary* which is based on the text preserved in the *Leabhar Breac* (*Cormac's Glossary,* tr. O'Donovan, ed. Stokes, Calcutta, 1868, p. 95), Stokes renders the last clause of this passage, "but there is a revelation at once from (the) ends of (the poet's) fingers"; the Irish text for this clause (*Three Irish Glossaries,* ed. Stokes, London, 1862, p. 25, *s.v.* "Himbas forosnai") is: *"acht faisnes do chendaib cnáime fócetoir."* Apparently in his translation of the Laud text, Stokes, rightly, rendered the Irish word *cnáim* as meaning 'bone,' while in his edition of the *Leabhar Breac* text he rendered the same word as 'finger.' This clause in *YBL* (Meyer's edition, *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts,* IV [1912], 64) appears thus: *"acht aisnéis do c[h]ennaib a chnámae fochédóir."* The text from the Book of Hy Maine, Meyer's edition, *Sitzungsber. der preuss. Akad. der Wissensch., Phil.—Hist. Klasse,* Apr. 3, 1919, p. 314, is of little assistance on this passage, since it has only the words "doce*n*naib ac*h*aine."

According to Stokes, *Cormac's Glossary,* 1868, *s.v.* "Imbas forosnai," note, O'Donovan translates this paragraph relating to *dichetal do chennaib* as follows: "he left *dichedul do chenduibh* (an extempore recital) to be composed in the *corus cerda* (the law of poetry) and the reason this was done is, because it requires no offering to demons, but merely an extempore recital *at once.*"

[21] Note 14, and text, *supra.*

son or thing before him, he makes a verse at once with the ends of his fingers, or in his mind without studying, and he composes and repeats at the same time. And this is after *the reception* of the New Testament; but this is not the way it was *done* before Patrick's time, but the poet," etc.

That the commentator is here attempting to describe *dichetal do chennaib,* although he does not actually name it, becomes clear when his assertions are considered in connexion with the statements of Cormac, viz., that *dichetal do chennaib* was performed through the media of the ends of the bones, and that this rite had the approval of Saint Patrick. In fact, although Stokes and other scholars have translated the term *dichetal do chennaib* by the expression "extempore incantation," it seems relatively certain that a better translation of *dichetal do chennaib* is 'incantation from the ends.'[22] It

[22] O'Curry, *Manners and Customs,* ed. Sullivan, III (1873), 569, translates the expression "the great extempore recital." Windisch, *IT,* I (1880), 479, in agreement with O'Curry, renders it "extempore recital." O'Donovan, *Ancient Laws,* I (1865), 45, and in *Cormac's Glossary* (ed. Stokes, 1868), *s.v.* "Imbas forosnai," renders the expression *dicetal do cendaib* as "extemporaneous recital." Stokes, *Phil. Soc. Trans.,* 1891-94, p. 157, modifies the translation somewhat, presenting it as "extempore incantation." These translations were probably suggested by the fact that Cormac's description of *dichetal do chennaib,* as well as that of the commentator, both quoted above, stress the lack of preparation and the coming of the inspired utterance *at once,* or without studying.

It will be observed, however, that both Cormac and the commentator assert that the declaration comes from the "ends of his bones." The Irish word "dicetla," according to O'Curry, *loc. cit.,* means "spells." Stokes, *loc. cit.,* apparently, renders *dichetal* as "incantation." It evidently had some such meaning as 'from singing.' Cf. *cétal* 'song,' *ML,* 60*a* 12; Thurneysen, *Handbuch des Alt-Irischen,* I (1909), 65, 69, 124, 415; Windisch, *IT,* I (1880), 422. *Chennaib* is obviously the dative plural of *cenn* (*cend*) 'head,' 'point,' 'end.' See Windisch, *op. cit.,* p. 418. A literal translation of the expression, therefore,

is also comparatively certain that the meaning of the term is 'incantation from the ends of the bones,' and that the name resulted from the nature of the operation.

It will be observed, however, that the passage quoted from the commentary on the *Ancient Laws* states in one place that the poet effects his composition through the "ends of his bones," while in another place it appears that he makes a verse "at once with the ends of his fingers." It seems quite natural that there should have been some confusion as to whether the incantation was effected through the ends of the bones or the ends of the fingers.[23] The latter would be for the poet the most easily available ends of the bones, and, whether the formula employed in *dichetal do chennaib* demanded the use of the "ends of the fingers" or "the ends of the bones," the ends of the fingers would in all probability be employed in the performance of the rite.

We have no definite information as to how the ends of the bones, or fingers, were used in this operation.

appears to be 'incantation from the ends.' As compared with the expression "extempore incantation"—which is apparently a mere guess based upon certain statements by ancient writers, rather than a translation of the term *dichetal do chennaib*—'incantation from the ends' as a meaning for this term not only has a justification in the early statements concerning this magic practice, but also has an etymological basis. Joyce, *A Social History of Ancient Ireland,* I (1903), 243-244, holds this view and gives an excellent discussion of the evidence. "Incantation from the ends of the bones" is the meaning approved by D'Arbois, *Introduction à l'étude de la littérature celtique,* Paris, 1883, pp. 251 ff., and *RC,* XXVIII (1907), 21-22.

[23] As pointed out above, note 20, Stokes translates the clause *"acht faisnes do chendaib cnáime fócetoir"* as "but there is a revelation at once from [the] ends of [the poet's] fingers." His rendering of the word *"cnáime"* to mean "fingers" instead of 'bones' probably resulted from an acquaintance with some description of *dichetal do chennaib* similar to that of the commentator already quoted.

According to the commentator, the poet composed and repeated at the same time without thinking or studying, evidently while the poet was in a sort of poetic frenzy, so that he unconsciously uttered the words of the composition from which he gained his conscious interpretation. This same type of unconscious utterance, the purport of which was then consciously realized, seems likewise to account for the "rhetoric" in *teinm laida* and *imbas forosna.* It will be noted, however, that in the performance of *dichetal do chennaib,* inspired utterance is the product of the inspiration and the ends of the bones or fingers are its source. The association of the two postulates a union of both. Yet, even if the fingers were not put into the mouth in the actual operation of *dichetal do chennaib,* it appears not unreasonable to assume, in view of its nature, that a tradition would be developed according to which the fingers were inserted in the mouth in the performance of this rite.[24]

Somewhat suggestive of, and possibly bearing some relation to, *dichetal do chennaib* are certain statements included in a passage connected with a very ancient charm or incantation against various ailments. This charm is preserved in Codex S. Galli, No. 1395, and may be as old as the eighth century.[25]

[24] Concerning this point, see D'Arbois, *RC,* XXVIII (1907), 21-22, and note, who associates Finn's putting his thumb into his mouth with *dichetal do chennaib.*

[25] Zeuss, *Grammatica Celtica,* 2d ed. by H. Ebel, Berlin, 1871, p. 949, prints the text and makes the following statement concerning it: *"Monumenta formae poëticae quae extant hibernica iam vetustissima consonantiam qualemcunque prae se ferunt. Venerandae haud dubie vetustatis sunt formulae incantationum servatae in uno folio facile saeculi octavi (quod continetur hodie in codice Sangallensi* n. 1395)."

This passage from the St. Gall codex has also been edited

A part of the charm and the passage connected therewith which may have a bearing upon the points in question are as follows:[36]

> "I save the dead alive. Against eructation, against spear-thong (*amentum*), against sudden tumour, against bleedings caused by iron, ... Whole be that whereon it (Diancecht's salve) goes. I put my trust in the salve which Diancecht left with his family that whole may be that whereon it goes.[37]
>
> "This is laid always in thy palm full of water when washing, and thou puttest it into thy mouth, and thou insertest the two fingers that are next the little-finger into thy mouth, each of them apart."

The relationship between the last paragraph and the incantation that precedes it is obscure. Unless the word "this" in the first line of the last paragraph refers to Diancécht's salve, one is in doubt as to what is laid in the palm full of water. Apparently the second paragraph is a description of the method of incitation employed either in the charm cited above or in some other magic practice. To whatever this paragraph may have belonged, it was obviously part of a charm in which something was put into the mouth. Although the insertion of the two fingers may be immediately connected with what is put into the mouth, it appears

and translated by Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus,* II (1903), 249. On the date of the codex, see *ibid.*, p. xxvii. On the date of the text, see Strachan, *ZCP,* IV (1903), 470 ff.

[36] Quoted from the translation by Stokes and Strachan, *loc. cit.* See also note, *ibid.*

[37] Diancécht is the name for the sage of leechcraft of Ireland, the chief physician of the Tuatha Dé Danann. See *Cormac's Glossary,* ed. Stokes, 1868, *s.v.* "Dian-cécht."

fully as likely that the act of putting the two fingers into the mouth had a magic significance in itself.

Here, then, are two very ancient traditions which seem to be in some way related to magic finger tips. One of them, *dichetal do chennaib,* concerned extempore incantation from the ends of the bones or fingers, with the probability that in the practice of the rite the fingers were put into the mouth; the other, preserved in the description of the operation employed in some rite, appears to attribute magic significance to the putting of two fingers into the mouth. What relationship, if any, exists between *dichetal do chennaib* and the paragraph preserved in the St. Gall codex does not appear. Either may have had its origin in the other, or, as seems not impossible, both, together with *imbas forosna,* may go back to an ancient belief in the magic power of the human hand.[28]

It thus appears that the ancient Irish poet was expected to be able to utilize one or more of three forms of magical divination. The first of these, *imbas forosna* 'the application of the palms which enlightens,' was evidently a sort of a trance state which was, in part at least, magically induced by the application of the two palms to the face; and what was dreamed during this trance was described through a "poetic" utterance.[29]

[28] See Hastings, *ERE,* VI (1914), *s.v.* "Hand," for discussion and bibliography.

[29] An attempt to rationalize this performance seems altogether unnecessary. For other discussions of *imbas forosna, teinm laida,* and *dichetal do chennaib,* see MacCulloch, *The Religion of the Ancient Celts,* 1911, pp. 248 ff.; Plummer, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae,* I (1910), clx, note 5; Joyce, *A Social History of Ancient Ireland,* I (1903), 242 ff., 433; O'Curry, *Manuscript Materials,* Re-issue, 1878, p. 240; O'Curry, *Manners and Customs,* II (1873), 227; Hyde, *A Literary History of Ireland,* 1903, pp. 84, 241.

The second, *teinm laida* 'illumination through song,'[30] seems to have been a form of rod-divination in which the poet's conscious knowledge came as a result of his semiconscious utterance.[31] The third, *dichetal do chennaib* 'incantation from the ends [of the bones, or fingers],' was apparently a form of magical incantation closely allied to *imbas forosna* and *teinm laida.* As the name suggests, the source of the inspired utterance seems to have been the ends of the fingers which were inserted in the mouth in the operation of the rite. This form of divination, to the exclusion of the other two, did not fall under the ban of Saint Patrick; but tradition relates that, in spite of the Saint's prohibition,

[30] Zimmer, *ZfdA,* XXXV (1891), 152, attempted a Norse etymology for the expression. He suggested that *teinm laida* meant "die hingeworfenen stäbe," and tried to compare this practice with the custom described by Tacitus, *Germania,* X, connected with the *surculi.* Zimmer's theory received little credence from scholars and is now almost completely discredited. Concerning this matter, see Stokes, *Academy,* XXXIX (1891), 210; Nutt, *Academy,* XXXIX (1891), 161 ff., and *Folk-Lore,* III (1892), 397; D'Arbois, *RC,* XII (1891), 295, 405; D'Arbois, *Introduction à l'étude de la littérature celtique,* Paris, 1883, pp. 246, 249-251, 254-258, and notes; MacNeill, *ITS,* VII (1904), xxvi; Loth, *RC,* XIII (1892), 506 ff.; Meyer, *Fianaigecht,* p. xviii, note; Thurneysen, *Königsage,* pp. 8, 71.

[31] *Teinm laida,* as well as the form of divination in which the *"oghumm"* is written on the four rods of yew, note 18, *supra,* is probably a form of rhabdomancy, a belief in the magic powers of which has existed among many peoples from the most ancient times to the present day. See D'Arbois, *Introduction à l'étude de la littérature celtique,* Paris, 1883, p. 251; MacCulloch, *The Childhood of Fiction,* 1905, p. 210, and *The Religion of the Ancient Celts,* 1911, p. 248; Baring-Gould, *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages,* Boston, 1867, pp. 54 ff.; Plummer, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae,* I (1910), clx, note 5, clxi ff., and notes; Lang, *Custom and Myth,* new ed., 1904, pp. 180 ff.; Wood-Martin, *Traces of the Elder Faiths of Ireland,* II (1902), 221 ff.

both of the others were practiced as late as the middle of the tenth century.[82]

In addition to the conclusions stated above, several other points seem equally clear. In the first selection quoted from the commentary on the *Ancient Laws,*[83] the commentator is either hopelessly ignorant concerning the meaning of any one of these three terms, or he is wilfully trying to invent new explanations for them.[84] In any event, considering his statements, it is not difficult to imagine that at a very early period there was such uncertainty concerning these terms that any one of the names might well have been used to designate any of the processes. This conclusion is strengthened by the fact that, in the second passage quoted from the commentary on the *Ancient Laws,* the rhabdomancy there described is called "Teinm Laegha, or Imus Forosna,"[85] and it receives further support in the somewhat flimsy explanation which the commentator presents to account for his knowledge that the two incantations were different. It also appears not improbable that at a very early period any one or all of these terms may have become entirely dissociated from the form of divination to which they were originally applied, and any one of them might have been used to designate any

[82] D'Arbois, *Introduction à l'étude de la littérature celtique,* Paris, 1883, p. 258; Joyce, *A Social History of Ancient Ireland,* I (1903), 244-5.

[83] Note 2, and text, *supra.*

[84] According to Atkinson's translation (based upon those of O'Donovan and O'Curry) of this passage, *Ancient Laws,* V (1901), 59, the commentator declares: " 'Dichedal do chennaib' i.e. there goes at once to him from the head of his art the common headship . . . . ." The commentator evidently knew that the word *cenn* meant 'head.' He seems to have been at sea, however, regarding the use of the term in connexion with this rite.

[85] Note 14, and text, *supra.*

form of what seemed to be inspired utterance. Altogether, these practices ascribed to the poet appear to have had their origin in, and to be reminiscent of, very ancient pagan magic incantations.[36]

It will at once be noted that in the foregoing descriptions of *dichetal do chennaib* the allusions to the ends of the bones or fingers are extremely suggestive of the thumb (or finger) of knowledge belonging to Finn. As has been pointed out in preceding chapters, four different Irish stories, three of which were extant in very ancient times, profess to explain the origin of this hero's power; and in like manner, four descriptions of the operation employed by him in the incitation of this power, each different from any of the others, were in existence before the end of the ninth century. All these stories and inciting processes have one point in common, viz., the insertion of the finger or thumb in the mouth as part of the operation from which Finn's power is derived. Furthermore, in the earliest accounts, this act is almost invariably associated with the magic incantations *imbas forosna* and *teinm laida.* Early descriptions of these two rites make it appear extremely unlikely that the source of the tradition lies

[36] For relationship between the druid and *fili,* see Thurneysen, *Königsage,* pp. 70 ff.; Plummer, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae,* I (1910), clxi ff., and notes. Concerning the druid, see Plummer, *op. cit.,* pp. clviii ff., and notes; D'Arbois, *Introduction à l'étude de la littérature celtique,* Paris, 1883, pp. 83 ff.; D'Arbois, *Les Druides et les Dieux celtiques,* Paris, 1906, pp. 1-142; T. Rice Holmes, *Ancient Britain and the Invasions of Julius Caesar,* 1907, pp. 289 ff., and *Caesar's Conquest of Gaul,* 2d ed., Oxford, 1911, pp. 523-9, and Index; MacCulloch, *The Religion of the Ancient Celts,* 1911, pp. 293 ff.; Hyde, *A Literary History of Ireland,* 1903, pp. 82 ff.; Joyce, *A Social History of Ancient Ireland,* I (1903), 219 ff.; T. D. Kendrick, *The Druids,* London, 1927, pp. viii, 1-227.

in either of them. Descriptions of *dichetal do chennaib,* however, not only furnish the inspiring ends of the fingers or bones, but also supply a strong likelihood that the fingers were inserted in the mouth in connexion with this incantation. Since, then, in the early texts Finn's inspiring thumb or finger is almost universally associated with *teinm laida* and *imbas forosna,* and since in the related incantation *dichetal do chennaib* the fingers likewise seem to be the source of the magic power, it appears not improbable that Finn's thumb or finger of knowledge was closely related in some way to *dichetal do chennaib.*

In corroboration of such a conclusion it may be noted that Finn, in early texts, is reputed to be a poet or *fili,*[87] and also that *imbas forosna, teinm laida,* and *dichetal do chennaib* were supposed to form part of a poet's stock in trade. When it is remembered that Saint Patrick is said to have abolished *imbas forosna* and *teinm laida* and to have tolerated the existence of *dichetal do chennaib,* it seems not unreasonable to conjecture that monastic scribes might have attributed the practice of *dichetal do chennaib* to Finn, the popular hero and poet. It has likewise been noted that at a

[87] Thurneysen, *IT,* III, 1 (1891), 66, edits an early text in which Find h*ua* Baiscne [Finn mac Cumaill] is named as a famous poet. Meyer, *Fianaigecht,* p. xxv, assigns this text to the eleventh century. Gwynn, *RIA, TLS,* X (1913), 96, 494, edits and translates an ancient poem ascribed to Finn. See also *Ériu,* I (1904), 186. According to certain ancient texts, Finn was a wizard (*drai*) ; see the *Acallam na Senórach,* ed. Stokes, *IT,* IV, 1 (1900), line 1456, and O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica,* II (1892), 136.

In this connexion it is interesting to note the remarkable similarity between the traditions relating to the probably fictitious Finn mac Cumaill and those relating to the celebrated Find fili mac Rossa Ruad. Both were poets, one living on the hill of Allen, the other on the hill of Almhain.

very early period much confusion existed concerning the names as well as nature of these three magic incantations. Under such conditions it appears not improbable that any one of the names, *imbas forosna, teinm laida,* or *dichetal do chennaib,* might well have been used to designate any one of the operations. With the practice of *dichetal do chennaib* attached to the popular poet, it also seems probable that the name of the practice might either have been lost entirely or have been replaced by the designation of either of the other incantations. Again, with the inspiring fingers or thumb of *dichetal do chennaib* attached to Finn, and all memory of their association with the incantation lost, it is not difficult to imagine that stories would be invented to account for the magic thumb or fingers. This would hold true even though the tale professed to explain the origin of the charm itself, and though the name of any one of the incantations remained attached to the operation.

From the foregoing data it seems perfectly safe to assume that Finn's thumb of knowledge was in some way connected with the magic practice *dichetal do chennaib;* and, furthermore, one is tempted to look for the source of *dichetal do chennaib* in primitive beliefs concerning the magic powers of the human hand. The fact, however, that a tradition which relates to an inspiring finger is also connected not only with the traditional history of the Norse Sigurd, but also with that of the Welsh Taliesin and the Scottish Fearachur Leigh, compels us to examine these parallels before we attempt to explain the tales concerning Finn.

CHAPTER IV

TALIESIN AND THE TRADITION OF THE THUMB OF KNOWLEDGE

In addition to the Irish and Scottish tales cited above, another story, likewise from Celtic sources, contains an episode which exhibits an unmistakable relationship to the tradition of the thumb of knowledge. In its present form, this legend, the well-known Welsh *Hanes Taliesin,* although found only in late manuscripts, may perhaps be traced back as far as the sixteenth or even the fourteenth century.[1] As it now stands, the *Hanes Taliesin* consists of a combination of prose and verse passages; and an episode concerning the finger of knowledge forms a part of its long prose introduction. A brief summary of the entire tale follows:[2]

[1] Concerning the date of the story and the oldest manuscript in which it is preserved, see Lady Charlotte Guest, *The Mabinogion,* London, III (1849), 395; Alfred Nutt, *The Mabinogion,* trans. Guest, ed. Nutt, 3d ed., 1910, p. 355; Meyer and Nutt, *The Voyage of Bran,* II (1897), 84; Skene, *The Four Ancient Books of Wales,* I (1868), 192 ff. Skene, *loc. cit.,* holds that no copy of this tale may be found in any known manuscript prior to the eighteenth century, and the statements of Lady Guest, *loc. cit.,* seem to bear out this conclusion. Nutt, however, *loc. cit.,* leaves the impression that the story exists in a manuscript dating from the end of the sixteenth century.

[2] This summary is made from the translation by Lady Charlotte Guest, *The Mabinogion,* III (1849), 356 ff. Concerning the basis of her edition of the *Hanes Taliesin,* Lady Guest may be thus quoted (*op. cit.,* p. 395) : "No perfect copy of the Mabinogi of Taliesin being accessible, it has been necessary to print it in the present series from two fragments. The former of the two is contained in a MS. in the Library of the Welsh School, in London. It is written in a modern round hand, and bears the title 'Y Prif-feirdd Cymreig, sef Canau &c. a gasglwyd ganwyf fi, William Morris o Gaergybi ym Môn, 1758.' The MS. is of Quarto size. The second fragment is from a MS. in the library of the late Iolo Morganwg, and was kindly

In times past there lived a man named Tegid Voel, and his dwelling was in the midst of Lake Tegid. His wife was called Caridwen. In addition to two children that had been born to them, a son and a daughter, there was another son, the most ill-favoured man in the world, Avagddu. Now his mother, Caridwen, knowing that he would not be admitted among men of noble birth, resolved to boil a Cauldron of Inspiration and Science for him, that his reception might be honourable because of his knowledge of the mysteries of the future state of the world. This cauldron should not cease to boil for a year and a day until three blessed drops of the Grace of Inspiration were obtained. She put Gwion Bach, the son of Gwreang of Llanfair, to stir the cauldron, and a blind man named Morda to kindle the fire beneath it.

One day toward the end of the year it chanced that three drops of the charmed liquor flew out of the cauldron and fell upon the finger of Gwion Bach, who, by reason of the great heat, put his finger into his mouth. The instant that he tasted those marvel-working drops, he foresaw everything that was to come and perceived that his chief care was to guard against the wiles of Caridwen. In very great fear he fled toward his own land. The cauldron thereupon burst in two because all the liquor within it was poisonous. Thereafter, the horses of Gwyddno Garanhir were poisoned from drinking the water of

communicated by his son, the late Mr. Taliesin Williams, (Ab Iolo.)"

Previous to Lady Guest's edition, the *Hanes Taliesin* had been translated in part by "Idrison" [William Owen Pughe] in the *Cambrian Quarterly,* V (1833), 198 ff. Dr. Pughe's version does not include two poems which appear in the version edited by Lady Guest. The Welsh text of the first part of the *Hanes Taliesin* has also been printed in the *Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales,* Denbigh, 1870, pp. 22 ff.

a stream into which the liquor from the cauldron ran.

Caridwen, seeing all the toil of the year lost, set out in pursuit of Gwion, who changed himself into a hare and fled. Caridwen, thereupon, became a greyhound and intercepted his flight. He then ran to the water and became a fish. She, in form of an otter-bitch, chased him under the water. He became a bird, but in the form of a hawk she followed him through the air. At last, seeing a pile of winnowed wheat on the floor of a barn, Gwion dropped upon the wheat and changed himself into one of the grains. Caridwen, in the form of a high-crested black hen, scratched the wheat with her feet, found him out, and swallowed him. At the end of nine months she was delivered of him, but because of his great beauty she could not kill him, whereupon, she wrapped him in a leathern bag and cast him into the sea.

Some time afterward this bag was found by Elphin, son of Gwyddno, who said that the child found therein should be called Taliesin. Elphin then placed the boy behind him on his horse and rode away. Presently the boy made a poem in which he praised Elphin and foretold honour to him. Asked by Elphin whether he was man or spirit, Taliesin made a poem in which he related the many forms he had assumed while fleeing from Caridwen.[8] Elphin took the boy home, where he was reared by Elphin's wife.

When Taliesin was thirteen years old, Elphin, visiting the court of King Maelgwn Gwynedd,

[8] It may here be noted that the tale recounted in the poem is wholly unlike the story of the transformations recorded in the prose. In the poem there is no suggestion that Caridwen assumed the forms of different animals, or of any animal; it merely asserts that Taliesin fled as a frog, a crow, a fox, a stag's antler, a grain of wheat, etc., and that he was thrown into a leather bag and set adrift on a boundless sea.

boasted that his wife was as virtuous as any lady in the kingdom, and that he had a bard who was more skilled than any of the king's poets. Hearing of this boast, the king cast Elphin into prison and sent Rhun, the king's son, to test the chastity of Elphin's wife. Through the strategy of Taliesin, Rhun was foiled in his purpose of proving Elphin's wife unchaste, and Elphin was partially vindicated. Taliesin then went to Maelgwn's court and cast shame and discomfiture on Maelgwn's twenty-four bards. Through his singing he not only proved to the king his superiority as a poet, but predicted that a most strange creature would come out of the sea-marsh to visit punishment upon Maelgwn. As Taliesin was singing his verse, a mighty storm of wind arose, and the king thought the castle would topple upon their heads. Thereupon, the king, causing Elphin to be brought from the dungeon, placed him before Taliesin; and as soon as this was done Taliesin sang a verse, and the chains fell from Elphin's feet.

The remainder of the tale is of no significance to our present investigation.

During the past half-century, problems connected with the origin and development of this story have been treated by a number of prominent scholars; but before proceeding to examine their works, it may be well to note certain features of Irish and Welsh tradition which possibly bear upon points in question.

First, a prominent place in Welsh tradition is occupied by the well-known but rather hazy character Gwynn ap Nudd (Gwynn, the son of Núada). Long ago it was pointed out that the Welsh word *Gwynn* and the Irish word *Finn* are cognates;[4] and it will

[4] J. Rhŷs, *Academy,* XXVII (1885), 46; T. Powel, *ibid.,* p. 64; Henderson, *The Celtic Review,* I (1904-5), 196 ff.

also be observed that the Irish Finn mac Cumaill was said to be a descendant of Núada, while Gwynn, as his name implies, is a reputed son of the same divinity.[5] On the whole, the character of Gwynn ap Nudd is, in general, more nebulous than that of Finn; and, furthermore, the two are totally unlike in many respects.[6] Certain accounts, however, show a similarity between them in that Gwynn, like Finn, was not only a great magician but also a great warrior.[7]

Generally speaking, it seems safe to assume that the Welsh Gwynn ap Nudd and the Irish Finn mac Cumaill may be equated in certain phases of Celtic tradition.[8] Yet, none of the many tales relating to Gwynn ap Nudd suggests that the legend of the thumb of knowledge was ever connected with him. This tradition is part of the story of Finn mac Cumaill, and in the *Hanes Taliesin* is likewise associated with the character known as Gwion Bach. Little is known of Gwion Bach aside

[5] See Kuno Meyer, *Academy,* XXVII (1885), 135; O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica,* II (1892), 99; Meyer, *RC,* XXXII (1911), 392; Meyer, *Fianaigecht,* p. xvii; Loth, *Les Mabinogion,* I (Paris, 1889), 252, note; Brown, *Modern Philology,* XVIII (1920-21), 664; Meyer, *ZCP,* VIII (1912), 560; Keating, *History of Ireland,* II, ed. and trans. by P. S. Dinneen, *ITS,* VIII (1905), 331; *Leabhar na Feinne,* ed. J. F. Campbell, London, I (1872), 34.

[6] *The Mabinogion,* ed. by Lady Guest, II (1849), 323 ff.; Loth, *op. cit.,* p. 252, note; Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore,* I (1901), 216.

[7] Loth, *Les Mabinogion,* I (Paris, 1889), 120, note 2, and 203, 224, 269; Loth, *Les Mabinogion,* II (Paris, 1889), 297. See also the poem from the Black Book of Caermarthen, edited and translated by Skene, *The Four Ancient Books of Wales,* I (1868), 293 ff. On Finn as a warrior, wizard, and hunter, see O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica,* II (1892), 104 ff.

[8] See Stern, *ZCP,* II (1899), 186; cf. *ZCP,* III (1901), 609; and *ZCP,* IV (1903), 579-580.

from what is related of him in the *Hanes Taliesin,* which includes a declaration that he was the son of Gwreang of Llanfair; and, although certain statements in early Welsh poems undoubtedly refer to him, these data, all of which seem to be connected in some way with incidents treated in the *Hanes Taliesin,* are, unfortunately, so obscure that practically nothing can be learned from them. In connexion with the identity of this character, however, it should be noted that just as Oisin, the mythical bard of Ireland, is the son of the Irish Finn mac Cumaill, so Taliesin, according to the *Hanes Taliesin,* is a rebirth of the Welsh Gwion Bach. Despite an apparent similarity between the name *Oisin* and the last part of the name *Taliesin,* there seems to be no ground for a philological equation of the two.[9] Nor, aside from the facts that Oisin and

[9] John Rhŷs, *The Hibbert Lectures,* 1886: *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by Celtic Heathendom,* 3d ed., London, 1898, p. 551, and notes, held that the word "Taliessin (Telessin, Telyessin)" is a compound, the meaning of which he did not know; but he felt that the latter part, *essin* or *eisin,* should be equated with "Ossín." He further believed that "Ossín" is a reduced or de-compounded form of the longer name corresponding to the Welsh "Telessin" or "Telyessin" and that he would regard Taliessin and Ossín as representing, in point of origin, one and the same character belonging to an earlier stage of Celtic mythology. For his discussion of the meanings of the compound, see *op. cit.,* pp. 545, 551, and notes. In the year 1892, however, Rhŷs held that the names "Oisín" and "Uisnech" had a common origin, and that they, and probably the name "Deirdre," were Pictish. See his statements in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland,* 3d Series, II (1892), 329. Alfred Nutt (*The Mabinogion,* tr. Guest, ed. Nutt, 3d ed., 1910, p. 383) considers the word "Taliesin" as a compound consisting of *tal* 'brow' and *essin* 'radiant,' 'noble.' As opposed to Rhŷs's opinion, it appears relatively certain that the word *Oisin* (*Oissín, Ossín*) is a diminutive of the Irish word *oss* 'deer,' 'fawn.' Concerning this point, see O'Curry, *Manuscript Materials,* p. 304; Meyer, *Fianaigecht,* p. xviii, note 3. See also Sir John Morris-Jones, *Y Cymmrodor,* XXVIII (1918), 23.

Taliesin are traditional bards of their respective countries, and that one is the son of Finn while the other is the rebirth of Gwion, do the characters seem to have anything in common, either as personalities or with respect to traditional stories concerning them.

In addition to the points noted above, certain poems and prose texts preserved in early Welsh and Irish manuscripts exhibit features which suggest a relationship between these apparently older compositions and the story known as the *Hanes Taliesin.* The first of these, a poem translated under the title "Hostile Confederacy" and ascribed to Taliesin, is preserved in the early fourteenth-century manuscript The Book of Taliesin.[10] The first 219 lines concern various and apparently unrelated subjects. The remainder of the poem reveals an unmistakable relationship to certain features found in the *Hanes Taliesin.* Lines 232-269 are here quoted *verbatim*:[11]

[10] Concerning this manuscript, see *The Book of Taliesin,* ed. J. Gwenogvryn Evans, 1910, pp. i ff. Cf. Sir John Morris-Jones, *Y Cymmrodor,* XXVIII (1918), 8; Skene, *The Four Ancient Books of Wales,* I (1868), 3; Nutt, *The Voyage of Bran,* II (1897), 86. Nutt here affirms that the Book of Taliesin contains a number of poems which are, for the most part, ascribed to the sixth-century Welsh bard Taliesin, though we know very little concerning their real date and nature. He further declares that it is a collection of pieces of the most diverse character, some of which may go back to the ninth or eighth centuries, whilst others are probably little older than the date at which they were incorporated in the manuscript. Concerning this point, see Evans, *op. cit.,* p. iii; Skene, *op. cit.,* pp. 184 ff.; Sir John Morris-Jones, *op. cit.,* pp. 13 ff., 37 ff.

[11] This quotation is taken from *Poems from the Book of Taliesin,* ed. and trans. by J. G. Evans, 1915, pp. 25-27. Cf. Skene, *op. cit.,* p. 532. Although the accuracy of Evans's translations has been subjected to question—see John Morris-Jones, *op. cit.,* p. 101; and note 19, *infra*—his rendering of the passages containing statements important to this investigation is closely in accord with that of Skene and will therefore be used.

"Another time I was enchanted:—
I was a kingfisher; I was a young salmon;
I was a hound, and I was a hind;
I was a buck on the mountain;
I was a butt, and I was a spade;
I was a hatchet in the hand;
I was the pin of the tongs,
for a year and a half.
I was a light-speckled cock
over cackling hens.
I was the stallion of a stud:
I was the bull of a homestead:
I was the miller's bolter—
the ground corn of the farmer.
I was a grain in the furrow's womb;
I grew up on a hill;
He, who sowed, reaped me;
Into the kiln-pipe he drove me;
He rubbed me out of hand,
while he was scorching me.
There received me a hen,
ruddy-clawed, with a divided comb;
I rested nine nights
in her womb a child.
I was confessed;
I was a wafer before the Gwledig.
I was dead; I was a wraith.
I have sung of what I passed through.
I was the scum on the lees;
Before that, I was yeast.
He, a second time, counselled me,
who gave me free grace.
It scarcely can be told—
greatly it will be praised.
I am Taliesin
I sing of true lineage.
I will continue to the end
in the pristine service of Elfin."

Another poem, *Kat Godeu,* likewise preserved in the Book of Taliesin, exhibits features which in some respects are similar to those found in the lines quoted above. Lines 1-14 of this may be quoted as follows:[12]

"I was in many a guise,
before I was disenchanted.
I am a grey-cowled minstrel:
I believe in illusion.
I was for a time in the sky:
I was observing the stars.
I was a message in writing:
I was a book to my priest.
I was the light of the altar-horns,
for a year and a half.
I was a bridge, which is stationed
over three score water-meets.
I went travelling: I was an eagle;
I was a coracle on the seas."

And again, lines 207-212 (Skene, lines 205-210):

"I was a speckled snake on the hill;
I was a dragon in the lake;
I was the slave of Kynbyn;
I was a herdsman besides.
My chasuble and chalice,
I declare, are not trumperies:"

Another poem which contains a passage very similar to those quoted from the *Kat Godeu* is likewise preserved in the Book of Taliesin. Lines 59-64 of this poem follow:[13]

"Henwyn, the gentle, brought
the story from Hiradug.

[12] *Poems from the Book of Taliesin,* ed. J. G. Evans, 1915, p. 27. Cf. Skene, *op. cit.,* pp. 276 ff. See further Sir John Morris-Jones, *op. cit.,* pp. 101 ff.

[13] Evans, *op. cit.,* p. 197. Cf. Skene, *op. cit.,* p. 309, lines 56-61.

I was a sow; I was a buck:
I was a wizard; I was a share:
I was a store pig; I was a store sow:
I was a hero in trouble:"[14]

Of minor importance to this investigation are certain statements which occur in early Welsh texts and which unquestionably are related to features found in the *Hanes Taliesin*. Several of these passages occur in a poem ascribed to Taliesin and preserved in the Book of Taliesin, this poem, including the lines in question, being also found in a manuscript of the early fourteenth century, the Red Book of Hergest. The lines which include the statements in question are as follows:[15]

"I have been with skilful men,
With Matheu and Govannon,
With Eunydd and Elestron,
In company with Achwyson,
For a year in Caer Gofannon.
I am old. I am young. I am Gwion,
I am universal, I am possessed of penetrating
wit."

Other passages found in poems preserved in the Book of Taliesin may likewise be cited:

"Gwion opens his mouth—
an accident his song."[16]

"I will ask the Lord
to consider my muse:
He sustained her need
before the days of Ceridwen."[17]

[14] It should be noted that neither this poem nor *Kat Godeu* has any statement designating Taliesin as the speaker.
[15] Skene, *op. cit.*, pp. 286-7. For data concerning the Red Book of Hergest, see *ibid.*, p. 3.
[16] Evans, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
[17] *Ibid.*, p. 43.

"The boilings of the cauldron
of the five sciences will run over:
(this overflow), Gwion's stream,
will produce fine weather,
white clover, and honey," etc.[18]

"I was with Bran, (son of Iweryd), in Ireland:"[19]

A group of Irish poems and traditions which may be traced to more ancient manuscript sources is practically identical with these Welsh poems and traditions of existence in various forms. Among the most important of these is a poem ascribed to Amairgen, which may be as old as the eighth century. This runs, in part, as follows:[20]

"I am the wind which blows o'er the sea;
I am the wave of the ocean;
I am the murmur of the billows;
I am the ox of seven battles;
I am the eagle on the rock;
I am a tear of the sun;

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 51.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 55. In connexion with this allusion to Ireland it is interesting to note that a poem preserved in the Book of Taliesin is entitled *"Mar(th)awd Corroi mab Dayry";* and a statement in this composition refers specifically to the contention of "Corroï" and "Chocholyn," undoubtedly the Irish heroes Curoi mac Daire and Cuchulinn. See Evans, *op. cit.*, pp. 144-145, who is certainly in error here; Skene, *op. cit.*, p. 254; and J. Morris-Jones, *Y Cymmrodor,* XXVIII (1918), 101.

[20] For data concerning this poem, manuscripts in which it is preserved, its age, etc., see D'Arbois, *Le Cycle mythologique irlandais et la mythologie celtique,* Paris, 1884, pp. 243 ff. It occurs in the ancient Irish document known as the *Lebor Gabála,* which, according to Nutt, *The Voyage of Bran,* II (1897), 92, note, may be called the second edition of that work. Nutt further held, *loc. cit.*, that since the poems were heavily glossed, "it is almost certain that they formed part of the original edition of the Lebor Gabála, which, known as it was to the early ninth-century Nennius, must be a product of the eighth century at the latest." Concerning the *Lebor Gabála,* see Thurneysen, *Königsage,* pp. 35, 47-48, and notes.

I am the most beautiful of plants;
I am a boar for courage;
I am a salmon in the water;
I am a lake in the plain;
I am the word of knowledge;"

Another Irish tale, which may be as old as the eighth century, "The Colloquy of Colum Cille and the Youth at Carn Eolairg," contains statements of a similar nature. This story, as the name indicates, takes the form of a dialogue between Colum Cille and a youth, Mongan, who asserts, in reply to the cleric's questions, that he has been a deer, a salmon, a seal, a roving wolf, a man, etc.[21] A close relationship to this tale of Colum Cille and Mongan is undoubtedly found in a passage which occurs in the *Imram Brain,* or 'The Voyage of Bran,' which dates from the seventh or eighth century. In this passage, Stanzas 50-59, Moninnán [*sic*], the son of Ler, predicts that his offspring [Mongan] shall exist in various shapes: a dragon, a wolf, a stag with horns of silver, a speckled salmon, a seal, etc.[22]

In addition to these tales of Amairgen and Mongan, several other stories preserved in ancient Irish texts incorporate features relating to existence in different forms. According to one tale, which, since it is preserved in the *Lebor na h-Uidre,* is at least as old as the eleventh century, Mongan is a rebirth of Finn mac Cumaill.[23] Other ancient Irish tales relate that the god

[21] For text and translation of this story, see Meyer, *ZCP,* II (1899), 313 ff. According to Meyer, the source of this text is the manuscript *H.*3.18, *T.C.D.* He holds, however, that the Old Irish original of this poem can not be later than the ninth century, and may even be assigned to the eighth.

[22] See Meyer and Nutt, *The Voyage of Bran,* I (1895), 24-27. For data concerning manuscripts, date of the poem, etc., see *ibid.,* p. xvi.

[23] *Ibid.,* p. 45 ff.

Lug, in the form of a little beast, was swallowed by the maiden Dechtire as she was drinking, and was reborn as Cuchulinn; that Etain was swallowed by Etar's wife and was born again as Etain; that both Conchobar and Conall Cernach are rebirths of gods who, in the shape of worms, were swallowed by the respective mothers of the two, Ness and Findchoem.[24]

Still greater significance in the investigation of problems relating to the *Hanes Taliesin* may attach to two Irish tales, "The Begetting of the Two Swineherds" and "Tuan mac Cairill's Story to Finnen of Moville." Since the former of these is preserved in *LL,* and the latter in *LU,* both may certainly be dated as early as the twelfth century; and, in fact, "The Begetting of the Two Swineherds" may be as old as the ninth, or even the eighth, century. A brief summary of the story concerning the swineherds follows:[25]

> Friuch was the swineherd of Bodb of the Síd ar Femun, and Rucht was the swineherd of Ochall of Síd Conachar, both Friuch and Rucht possessing the lore of paganism and that of changing themselves into any shape, as did Mongan,

[24] For these tales and information concerning manuscripts, differing versions, dates, editions, and translations, see Nutt, *The Voyage of Bran,* II (1897), 38 ff.

[25] The text of this tale from the fifteenth-century manuscript *Eg.* 1782 has been edited and translated by Windisch, *IT,* III, 1 (1891), 230-278. Windisch edits it as it is found in two manuscripts, gives a German translation of one of the texts, and provides copious notes. A shorter form of the story preserved in the twelfth-century Book of Leinster has been translated by Meyer and published by Nutt, *The Voyage of Bran,* II (1897), 58 ff. In addition to printing Meyer's translation of the *LL* text, Nutt, *loc. cit.,* presents a rendition of the story, the first part based upon Meyer's translation of *LL,* the latter part upon Windisch's version of the more elaborate recension in *Eg.* 1782. The summary included here is made from Meyer's translation of the *LL* text, *loc. cit.*

the son of Fiachna. Incited by friends, each employed his magic power against the other, and, as a result of Friuch's might, Rucht's swine suffered, while in the following year Friuch's swine were distressed through Rucht's power. Thereupon, both swineherds were discharged, but they continued their conflict. For two years they strove against each other as ravens; two years more they combatted each other as water beasts; then they fought against each other as two stags, two champions, two spectres, and two dragons;[28]

[28] Concerning certain details which appear here, Nutt, *op. cit.*, p. 66, makes the following assertion: "The unprejudiced reader will certainly agree with Professor Windisch that the Book of Leinster scribe, or his model, had before him a complete version, the same, substantially, as that now found in the fifteenth century MS. Eg. 1782. There are, however, slight differences. Thus the Book of Leinster mentions two transformations, into stags and into dragons, unknown to Eg. 1782, but unknown also to the final recapitulation of the legend which it gives itself. A further proof this, if more were needed, that the story, as it stands, embodies accounts drawn from different sources. The loss of the dragon transformation is particularly regrettable."

From the foregoing quotation, it would appear that Nutt considered the episode of the two dragons to be a part of an early form of the story, omitted in *Eg.* 1782. Questions arise, however, as to whether the tale preserved in *Eg.* 1782 may not be a more exact rendering of the original story than that found in *LL*, and whether the episode relating to the dragons is not an interpolation on the part of the *LL* scribe or of some writer who produced the model used by him. In this connexion, it is interesting to note that the story of the "Two Swineherds" is preserved in a prose *Dindshenchas* (*RC*, XV [1894], 464 ff.). According to the version in the *Dindshenchas*, the swineherds fought as two sons of Cronn, Rucht and Rucne, two birds, two wolves, two trout, two worms, and two bulls. Furthermore, as Nutt has indicated, although the dragons appear in the body of the *LL* tale, they are not mentioned in the recapitulation of transformations which forms the conclusion of this story, according to which the swineherds fought as two swineherds, Rucht and Rucne, two birds, two sea-beasts, two champions, two spectres, two worms, and two bulls. According to the version of *Eg.* 1782, they fought as two swineherds, two ravens, two water beasts, two champions, two demons, two worms, and two bulls. The recapitulation of transformations

and finally they became two worms. One of these worms dropped into a well in Cualgne, where the cow of Dáre mac Fiachnai drank it; and the other fell into a well in Connaught, where a cow of Ailill and Medb drank it. From these worms, accordingly, sprang the two bulls, The Whitehorn Ai and the Dun of Cualgne.[27]

The story of Tuan mac Cairill may be summarized thus:[28]

Partholon with a company of twenty-four couples was the first to take Ireland after the Flood, and their offspring increased until there were five thousand of their race. Then all died save one, Tuan, who was alone in Ireland for twenty-two years, when the island was taken again. Tuan, old and decrepit, was changed into a young and lusty stag, and in this form he watched the rise and fall of the peoples who constituted this second invasion, i.e., the race of Nemed. Again becoming old, he changed into a

which forms the end of the Egerton version relates that they fought as two swineherds, Rucht and Ruccne, two ravens, two sea-beasts, two champions, two worms, and two bulls. Since, then, the episode of the dragons is not included in the recapitulation of the transformations in *LL*, in the version preserved in the *Dindshenchas*, or in that contained in *Eg.* 1782, and since the dragon is a creature which is not common to early Irish tradition, one is tempted to favour a belief that the episode of the two dragons did not form part of the early story upon which these varying versions are based.

[27] According to the story as related in the *Táin*, these two bulls, apparently continuing their conflict, engaged in a mortal combat in which The Whitehorn Ai was destroyed. For an account of this combat, see Dunn, *The Ancient Irish Epic Tale Táin Bó Cuálnge*, 1914, pp. 363 ff.

[28] This tale is preserved in several manuscripts, the oldest of which is the *Lebor na h-Uidre*. A critical edition and English translation of the text has been published by Meyer, *The Voyage of Bran*, II (1897), 285 ff. It is upon Meyer's edition and translation that this summary is based. See also D'Arbois, *Le Cycle mythologique irlandais et la mythologie celtique*, Paris, 1884, pp. 47 ff.

boar and watched the rise and decline of the third immigrant race, that of Semion. When old age again overtook him, he changed into a large hawk, and in this shape he lived a long time, surviving all the races who invaded Ireland and witnessing the inroads of both Beothach and Mil. He then passed into the shape of a river-salmon, again strong and vigorous, and for a long time managed to escape from the hands of fishermen, the claws of hawks, and from fishermen's spears. He was finally caught, however, by the fisherman of Cairill, was eaten by Cairill's wife, and passed into her womb. (Although it is not so stated in the story, it is to be inferred that he was delivered of her in natural fashion.)

In connexion with these ancient Irish stories of existences in different forms and of rebirth it may be noted that they exhibit a striking similarity to tales in Egypt, India, and elsewhere, which antedate the Irish stories by many centuries.[29]

More than fifty years ago, D. W. Nash pointed out that the words *Gwion* and *Fion* were cognates, and that the part of the *Hanes Taliesin* which relates to Gwion's gift of prophecy and inspiration has its counterpart not only in Irish stories regarding the hero Finn, but also in Norse tales concerning the famous Sigurd. Asserting that the details of the Welsh story are all modern and all Christian, he states that in his opinion the Welsh version, as it is preserved in the *Hanes Taliesin,* is certainly the least ancient of the three forms of the tale. In connexion with this opinion he raises a question as

[29] See W. E. Leonard, *The Fragments of Empedocles,* 1908, p. 55; J. G. Evans, *The Book of Taliesin* (Facs. and Text), 1910, pp. iii ff.; Hastings, *ERE, s.v.* "Metamorphosis"; D. W. Nash, *Taliesin; or the Bards and Druids of Britain,* London, 1858, p. 185.

to whether the author of the Welsh recension modernized a more ancient form or adapted an Irish story.[30]

Further opinions held by Nash may be summarized as follows:

1. The songs in the *Hanes Taliesin* were "edited" by Thomas ab Einion in the thirteenth century.[31]

2. Although the poems which constitute the *Hanes Taliesin,* as well as the majority of other poems attributed to Taliesin, were composed in their present form as late as the thirteenth century, the ideas and traditions embodied in the romance composed by Thomas ab Einion Offeiriad had previously existed in the form of tales and poems which had already acquired extensive popularity.[32]

3. Since Gwilym Ddu, who flourished somewhat later than the thirteenth century, mentions "Taliesin" as "Gwion," one is led to the conclusion that the romance of Taliesin was in vogue in the twelfth century, and that the present form of the story was compiled from an older romance in which the name of Taliesin had already become an object of popular admiration.[33]

4. Those who find evidences of a doctrine

[30] D. W. Nash, *Taliesin; or the Bards and Druids of Britain,* 1858, pp. 324 ff. It is interesting to note that many of the facts and ideas presented in his book have been treated in scholarly articles of more recent date without allusion to him. In spite of the fact that certain opinions expressed by Nash may be open to serious criticism, his work has scarcely been accorded the recognition to which it is entitled.

It is also interesting to note that, as early as 1857, George Borrow (*The Romany Rye,* II, Chapter XLIV) pointed out the similar incidents in the legends of Sigurd and Finn and seemed to be of the opinion that the Irish had borrowed the episode from the Danes.

[31] Nash, *op. cit.,* p. ix.

[32] *Ibid.,* pp. 36, 151.

[33] *Ibid.,* p. 39.

of metempsychosis in this tale, at least with respect to the changes of form experienced by the fleeing Gwion, have not made a distinction between transmigration and transformation.[84]

5. On reference to the *Mabinogion* it becomes abundantly evident that these tales have nothing to do with the doctrine of transmigration of the soul after death. They do, on the other hand, have to do with the machinery of necromancers and magic, such as has been possessed more or less abundantly by all people in all ages.[85]

6. In this story of Taliesin and his transactions with Maelgwn there seems to be a strong resemblance to the story told by Nennius and Geoffrey of Monmouth concerning Merlin Emmrys and Vortigern. In both cases the magician, prophet, and bard is one born without a father; as Merlin questions the wise men and they are ashamed, so Taliesin casts a spell on the twenty-four bards of Maelgwn; as Merlin foretells the coming of the sons of Constantine, so Taliesin prophesies the destruction of Maelgwn by means of the sea-serpent. Furthermore, even the names "Merlin" and "Taliesin" are confused. Taliesin himself says, "Idno and Heidiu called me Merdinn. At length every king will call me Taliesin."[86]

Certain views of John Rhŷs concerning the *Hanes Taliesin* may likewise be summarized:[87]

1. In this story Taliesin is the Sun-god in the person of a great bard or poet; he is a mythic character, and the poems ascribed to him, con-

[84] *Ibid.*, p. 180. Nash alludes here to an opinion quoted from Stephens, *Literature of the Kymry*, London, 1849, p. 188.
[85] *Ibid.*, p. 180.
[86] *Ibid.*, pp. 197 ff.
[87] John Rhŷs, *The Hibbert Lectures*, 1886: *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by Celtic Heathendom*, 3d ed., London, 1898, pp. 543 ff.

cerning the authorship of which nothing is known, represent a school of Welsh bardism.

2. The part *essin* or *eisin* of the word "Taliessin (Telessin, Telyessin)" can be equated with "Ossín," which may be regarded as a reduced or de-compounded form of the longer name corresponding to the Welsh "Telessin," or "Telyessin." Ossín and Taliessin may likewise be regarded as representing, in point of origin, one and the same character belonging to an earlier stage of Celtic mythology.[38]

3. Although Ossín is the son of Finn, and Taliessin is Gwion reborn, this discrepancy is "not such as to preclude our comparing Gwion and Finn with one another."

4. The Irish word *"Fiann,"*[39] meaning a "band of warriors," may be equated "letter for letter" with the Welsh word *Gwion,*[40] the meaning of which is unknown; and while this fact does not amount to a proof of the identity of the names, it becomes an important item of evidence when backed by an unmistakable parallel between the stories about Gwion and Finn.[41]

At this point in his treatment of these stories Rhŷs evidently encountered a difficulty (*op. cit.,* pp. 558-61). Having assumed that the Welsh Gwion and Taliessin

[38] For the discussion of the meanings of this compound, see Rhŷs, *op. cit.,* p. 551, and note. See also note 10, *supra.*

[39] See Meyer, *Fianaigecht,* pp. v ff., and notes.

[40] Rhŷs makes no suggestion that the words *Finn* and *Gwynn* are cognates. In connexion with this point, see note 4, *supra.*

[41] The parallel to which allusion is made is formed by the two stories which concern Finn's and Gwion's acquisition of the power of foresight. Rhŷs here mentions the episode according to which Gwion accidentally tastes the brew, and gives a summary of the incident of the salmon of knowledge as recorded in the *Macgnímartha Finn.* See Chapter II, *supra.* In connexion with the salmon of knowledge he discusses Connla's well, the magic hazels, etc. and cites similar episodes from other sources.

were respectively the Irish Finn and Ossín, and having treated Finn as the "Goidelic equivalent of the Welsh Gwyn, son of Nûd, king of the fairies and the demons of the spirit world," he found it "impossible to identify Gwion or Taliessin with that repellent personage, or with any other, perhaps, but Gwyn's direct antagonist, the Sun-god."[42] In dealing with this difficulty, Rhŷs held (*op. cit.*, pp. 559-560):

> Gwion-Taliessin may be identified with the Sun-god. Gwyn, son of Nûd, with whom the Irish Finn is to be considered as the Goidelic equivalent, may be identified with the king of demons, the direct antagonist of the Sun-god. The explanation lies in the fact that the Irish have confounded two Finns of the most incompatible characters under one name. The words *Finn* and *Gwyn* both mean "white." It may not be stated, however, [as far as Rhŷs was aware] that the Welsh ever called Gwion by the name of *Gwyn* or *Gwion Gwyn*. If they did, it may be assumed that they dropped the *Gwyn* part in order to avoid the sort of confusion which [he believed] arose on Irish ground.

In proof that the Irish confounded two incompatible Finns under one name, he asserted (*loc. cit.*):

> Irish stories "about Finn divide themselves into two groups, namely, (1) those connected with a Gwion-Finn (or Deimne Finn, corresponding to Gwion), but especially that concerning his acquisition of the power of divination, and (2) those relating to a Gwyn-Finn (or

[42] In Rhŷs's argument, as, indeed, throughout this entire investigation, a clear distinction should be maintained between the characters Gwynn (Gwyn) and Gwion. The former is Gwynn ap Nud, a well-known character in Welsh romance; the latter, Gwion Bach, is a character known only, in so far as it can be proved, in connexion with Taliesin.

Finn Éces, corresponding to Gwyn ab Nûd), such, for example, as the long story of the antagonism between Finn and Diarmait."

Rhŷs thereupon cited episodes from the late tale *Toruigheacht Dhiarmuda agus Ghrainne* in support of his thesis that Finn, the counterpart of Gwyn, was an antagonist of Diarmait, a solar hero.[43] This sums up the salient points of Rhŷs's discussion and all that will be of import in the following investigation.

The views held by Alfred Nutt concerning the origin and development of the *Hanes Taliesin* may be summarized thus:[44]

> The story in its existing form cannot be traced farther back than the end of the sixteenth or beginning of the seventeenth century, but its component elements are immeasurably older. The transformation-fight incidents are presupposed by several poems in the so-called Book of Taliessin, a manuscript of the thirteenth century, containing a number of poems, for the most part ascribed to the sixth-century Welsh bard, Taliessin, but concerning the real date and nature of which we know very little. It is a collection of

[43] There can be no doubt that the story of Diarmait and Grainne is a very ancient one. There is an allusion to Grainne's elopement with Lughaidh in the "Book of Aicill" (*Ancient Laws of Ireland,* III [1873], edited by T. O'Mahony and A. G. Richey, Dublin, p. 533), and a statement concerning her love for someone, probably Diarmait, in a gloss on the *Amra Choluimb Chille;* see Meyer, *RC,* XI (1890), 125-6, and Stokes, *RC,* XX (1899), 154-157. The gloss on the *Amra Choluimb Chille* is, at least, as old as the eleventh century, and the statement in the "Book of Aicill" may in all probability be assigned to a much earlier date. See also A. Nutt, *Folk and Hero Tales,* ed. MacInnes, 1890, p. 403, and Chapter I, note 18, *supra.* A complete story of the elopement of Diarmait and Grainne is, however, found only in late manuscripts. See D'Arbois, *Essai,* p. 249. For the story, see O'Grady, *OS,* III (1855), 40-211.

[44] Meyer and Nutt, *The Voyage of Bran,* II (1897), 84 ff.

pieces, some of which may go back to the ninth or eighth centuries, whilst others are perhaps little older than the date at which they were incorporated in the manuscript. The prose introduction to the *Hanes Taliessin* and the poem concerning the hen and the grain of wheat must relate to the same tradition.[45] The verse, furthermore, presupposes a story the incidents of which were familiar to the poet's hearers. The story presupposed by the verse, however, differed in details from the prose story preserved in the solitary late manuscript, the redaction of which may have taken place at the end of the sixteenth century, the traditional date of Hopkin ap Philip, to whom it is ascribed, although it may also be placed [and Nutt inclined toward this view] in the late fourteenth century.

Concerning the matter of the story, Nutt held:[46]

There are three hypotheses which may be stated: 1. It may be considered as a Welsh adaptation, fitted into the national history, of an Irish romance. In this case it is not likely to be younger than the twelfth century, after which date Irish literature does not seem to have affected Wales. 2. It may be considered as going back to the hypothetical Goidels of Britain. 3. It may be considered as belonging to a fund of mythic romance common to both Goidels and Brythons. There is much that speaks in favour of the second hypothesis. Of all the products of Welsh romance the *Hanes Taliessin* is the one that testifies most strongly to community of mythic tradition between the race to which it is due and the Goidels of Ireland. While there is no story that makes Ossin a rebirth of Finn, yet we have a story to the effect that he was born

[45] See note 11, and text, *supra.*
[46] *Op. cit.,* pp. 87 ff.

whilst his mother was in animal shape, and we recall that Finn was reborn as Mongan.[47] Thus Rhŷs's philological equation of "Telyessin," son [*sic*] of Gwion, with Ossin, son of Finn, is sustained by some likeness of circumstance between the Irish and Welsh father and son. This likeness, however, is limited to the central conception. The difference in details makes it entirely out of the question to regard the Taliessin birth-story as a possible loan from the Finn cycle, which, as it has come down to us, contains nothing that could suggest the incidents of the Welsh tale. The equation must date back to the time when elements which have disappeared from the Finn saga or have survived casually, like Finn's rebirth as Mongan or Ossin's animal parentage, were far more prominent.

In further discussion of the Finn-Oisin Gwion-Taliesin parallel he declared:[48]

[47] According to a statement preserved as a marginal note in the Book of Leinster (*Facsimile,* p. 164), "Ossine" was begotten upon Blai (daughter) of Derg while she was in the form of a deer. Concerning this story, see Cross, *Modern Philology,* XVI (1918-19), 654 ff., and notes; Meyer, *Fianaigecht,* p. xxvi; Nutt, *The Voyage of Bran,* I (1895), 151; T.W.Rolleston, *The High Deeds of Finn,* New York, 1910, pp. 149 ff.; P. Kennedy, *Legendary Fictions of the Irish Celts,* London, 1866, pp. 235 ff.; MacCulloch, *The Religion of the Ancient Celts,* Edinburgh, 1911, pp. 150, 323. For further bibliography, see the article by Cross, *loc. cit.*

Several manuscripts, of which *LU* is the most ancient, contain a story which relates that Mongan was a rebirth of Finn. For a critical text and English translation of this, see Meyer and Nutt, *The Voyage of Bran,* I (1895), 45 ff. See further Meyer and Nutt, *op. cit.,* pp. 136 ff.; D'Arbois, *Le Cycle mythologique irlandais et la mythologie celtique,* Paris, 1884, pp. 336 ff.; MacInnes and Nutt, *Folk and Hero Tales* (*Waifs and Strays of Celtic Tradition, Argyllshire Series,* II), 1890, pp. 404 ff., 428 ff.; Thurneysen, *Königsage,* p. 17. It has, no doubt, been noted that in the tale of the two swineherds, summarized above, there is an allusion to Mongan's ability to change himself into other shapes.

[48] Meyer and Nutt, *op. cit.,* pp. 88-89.

As Finn, the chief Gaelic representative of the Aryan hero whose fortunes have been summed up as the Aryan Expulsion and Return Formula,[48] furnishes in this Aryan story-cycle an example of the hero's birth which may be called historical, as in the case of Cyrus or Siegfried, so Taliessin's birth-story is as marked an example of the mythical form of the incident, e.g., that of Perseus, or of Romulus and Remus, as can be found within the entire range of the cycle. Although the after-adventures of Taliessin do not correspond at all to the formula type, whereas those of Finn do, the miraculously conceived re-birth of the Welsh equivalent of Finn through a goddess dwelling beneath the waves, one form of the Celtic Otherworld, takes us back to a stage of the Finn legend which must have been extremely rich in mythical incident. "Let us pursue the parallel further. In Irish legend Finn's re-birth, Mongan, is son of Manannan, lord of the Happy Otherworld lying beyond the western waves, and is himself closely connected with that land. In Welsh legend Finn's (Gwion's) re-birth Taliessin, son of the Otherworld goddess, Caridwen, is likewise connected with that mysterious realm." Caridwen's husband lived in the midst of Lake Tegid.

In his discussion of the transformation features of the *Hanes Taliesin,* Nutt, having called attention to certain poems, notably *Kat Godeu,*[50] which claim for him (the bard) a capacity of metamorphosis more general in its character, and to the Irish poem of Amairgen,[51] asserted:[52]

[48] See Chapter II, note 50, *supra.*
[50] See note 12, and text, *supra.*
[51] See note 20, and text, *supra.*
[52] Meyer and Nutt, *op. cit.,* p. 92.

"Amairgen, chief poet of the race which is to conquer the Tuatha de Danann, the lords of Faery, and Taliessin, chief of the Welsh poets, son of the enemy of the goddess of the cauldron, the Welsh counterpart of the Irish Tuatha De, may be regarded as varying forms of one mythic original. Their pretentions are the same, and have the same basis. Foes of the wizard gods who shift their shape, who are invisible at will, who manifest themselves under different forms, they, too, by might of the magic all-compelling chanted spell, have acquired like powers. It has been pointed out by M. d'Arbois de Jubainville, and Professor Rhys agrees with him,[53] that the Irish version has retained a more archaic form of the conception underlying both poems."

At different times and in several of his works Canon J. A. MacCulloch has stated his views concerning the problems connected with the origin and development of the *Hanes Taliesin.* In *The Childhood of Fiction* he held that "though such a story as this is sometimes used to prove the Celtic (Druidic) doctrine of metempsychosis, it really proves nothing more than that a folk-tale of wide occurrence has been grafted on to a Celtic mythological cycle, ..."[54] In a later work, having pointed out that in Welsh mythology the *Hanes Taliesin* affords an example of rebirth, and that this rebirth is preceded by a "transformation combat" resembling that of the two swineherds, he asserts:[55]

[53] *Le Cycle mythologique irlandais et la mythologie celtique,* Paris, 1884, p. 246; *The Hibbert Lectures,* 1886, 3d ed., 1898, London, p. 549.

[54] J. A. MacCulloch, *The Childhood of Fiction,* London, 1905, p. 166.

[55] J. A. MacCulloch, *The Religion of the Ancient Celts,* Edinburgh, 1911, pp. 351, 353 ff. Concerning the story of the two swineherds, see note 25, and text, *supra.*

"The previous tranformations in both cases [the *Hanes Taliesin* and the tale of the swineherds] belong to the Transformation Combat formula of many *Märchen,* and obviously were not part of the original form of the myths. In all such *Märchen* the antagonists are males, hence the rebirth incident could not form part of them. In the Welsh tale of Gwion and in the corresponding Taliesin poem,[56] the ingenious fusion of the *Märchen* formula with an existing myth of rebirth must have taken place at an early date.[57] This is also true of *The Two Swineherds,* but in this case, since the myth told how two gods took the form of worms and were reborn of cows, the formula had to be altered."

In a rather general statement concerning the *Hanes Taliesin,* MacCulloch declares:[58]

"Late as is the *Hanes Taliesin* or story of Taliesin, and expressed as much of it is in a *Märchen* formula, it is based on old myths about Cerridwen and Taliesin of which its compiler made use, following an old tradition already stereotyped in one of the poems in the *Märchen* formula of the Transformation Combat. But the mythical fragments are also mingled with traditions regarding the sixth century poet Taliesin."

[56] The "tale of Gwion" is the *Hanes Taliesin.* Concerning the "corresponding Taliesin poem," see note 11, and text, *supra.*

[57] Apparently, MacCulloch holds that the tradition underlying the poem which includes the episode of the hen and the grain of wheat has been made up through the fusion of a "transformation combat" *motif* and a myth relating to rebirth. He also seems to consider that the fusion of these two elements took place at an early date. See further MacCulloch, *op. cit.,* p. 353, note 1.

[58] *Op. cit.,* p. 116. The poem to which allusion is made is the one containing the episode of the hen and the grain of wheat. See note 11, and text, *supra.*

And again, referring to the story of Tuan mac Cairill, he holds:[59]

> This story "must have been based on pagan myths of a similar kind, involving successive transformations and a final rebirth. Such a myth may have been told of Taliesin, recounting his transformations and his final rebirth, the former being replaced at a later time by the episode of the Transformation Combat, involving no great lapse of time."

In a more recently published work,[60] MacCulloch again expresses views concerning the *Hanes Taliesin* which are essentially the same as those just noted. Having pointed out the parallel existing between the episodes relating to Gwion's burned finger and Finn's burned thumb, he cites the opinion of Rhŷs and J. G. Campbell that the words *Oisin* and *Taliesin* may be equated. Holding that the name *Oisin* is probably equivalent to *essin,* he calls attention to the fact that Taliesin's shape-shifting has no parallel in the tales relating to Oisin. Further stating that the *Hanes Taliesin* was written in the sixteenth or seventeenth century, he asserts that it contains mythical elements which introduce old divinities; a culture hero or god, Taliesin; and the conceptions of inspiration, rebirth, and shape-shifting, the last being expressed in the folk-tale formula of the "Transformation Combat," as it is in one of the poems. Concerning the idea of shape-shifting as expressed in the folk-tale formula of the "Transformation Combat" combined with the Celtic tradition of rebirth,[61] MacCulloch asserts that the *Hanes Taliesin*

[59] *Ibid.,* p. 358. Concerning the story of Tuan mac Cairill, see note 28, and text, *supra.*

[60] *The Mythology of All Races,* III (Boston, 1918), 109-113.

[61] *Ibid.,* pp. 56-57.

is a sixteenth-century tale, "based on earlier poems in which this formula [the "Transformation Combat"] is already prefixed to the rebirth incident."

It will at once be noted that scholarship is agreed upon certain major questions relating to the origin and development of the *Hanes Taliesin.* All believe that the story in its present form is a relatively late work, the date of composition ranging from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century. All hold that the ideas and traditions embodied in the story had existed previously in the form of tales and poems. All are likewise in accord that there is an intimate relationship between this Welsh story of Gwion and Taliesin and the Irish tradition relating to Finn and Oisin. Concerning these points there can be little doubt. There are, however, some conclusions which are not convincing; and, furthermore, a consideration of the evidence at hand suggests questions for which the theories propounded offer no answer. One of these questions, and one which is the subject of this investigation, concerns the source of the episode of the burned finger in the *Hanes Taliesin.* In an attempt to ascertain this source, as well as to inquire into the validity of the foregoing opinions concerning the origin and development of the *Hanes Taliesin,* certain important facts may be reviewed.

As has been indicated above,[63] it seems relatively certain that the Welsh Gwynn ap Nudd and the Irish Finn mac Cumaill may be equated. Apparently, then, either these two characters may be traced along independent lines to a common source, or one may be a development from the other. It was also pointed out

[63] Note 8, and text, *supra.*

above that among the many stories relating to Gwynn ap Nudd there is no suggestion that the tradition of the thumb of knowledge was ever connected with him. This tradition, however, has been associated with Finn mac Cumaill from the very earliest period known. These facts and conclusions at once suggest a question, viz., if Gwynn ap Nudd and Finn mac Cumaill may be traced to a common source, or if one is a development from the other, how may we account for the fact that the tradition of the thumb of knowledge is invariably associated with the one and apparently has never been connected with the other? If it is to be assumed that the Irish Finn is a development from the Welsh Gwynn, it appears probable that the tradition relating to Finn's thumb of knowledge evolved after the borrowing. If, on the other hand, one supposes that the Welsh Gwynn is a development from the Irish Finn—only a superficial resemblance to Finn having been borrowed, and the tradition of the thumb of knowledge, although it might have been, not having been taken over—it seems relatively certain that the borrowing took place prior to the origin of that legend. If, again, it may be assumed that the two characters Finn and Gwynn may be traced along independent lines to a common source, it appears highly probable that the story of the thumb of knowledge grew up only as an Irish development and affected only the Irish representative of the Finn-Gwynn equation. In any event, it seems relatively certain that the tradition of the thumb of knowledge is traceable to an Irish source in so far as it concerns Finn mac Cumaill and Gwynn ap Nudd.

The thumb of knowledge is, however, associated with

Gwion Bach; and, furthermore, the words *Gwion* and *Gwynn* are obviously only variants of the same name, while the name *Gwynn* may be equated with *Finn.* But the tradition of the thumb of knowledge which, apparently, has never been associated with Gwynn ap Nudd is attached both to Finn mac Cumaill and to Gwion Bach. What, then, may be said of the character Gwion Bach and his relationship to Finn mac Cumaill and to Gwynn ap Nudd? In the first place, he is said to be the son of Gwreang of Llanfair. Again, except for the similarity of the names *Gwion* and *Gwynn,* the characters are dissimilar in every respect. Furthermore, the few allusions in Welsh tradition to a Gwion who may be identified with Gwion Bach with any degree of certainty appear only as intimately connected with the bard Taliesin and only in poems which apparently served as a basis for certain parts of the *Hanes Taliesin.*[68] In short, Gwion Bach seems to be a character who in Welsh tradition appears only in the *Hanes Taliesin* and in a few poems containing certain elements which entered into the construction of that tale. It may further be noted that upon no occasion other than that recorded in the prose introduction of the *Hanes Taliesin* does Gwion make use of his magic finger, nor, except in this instance, does early Welsh tradition give evidence tending to establish a belief that an episode containing a burned finger or a form of divination involving the use of a finger is or has ever been associated with a charac-

[68] See notes 12-17, and text, *supra.* Rhŷs, *The Hibbert Lectures,* 1886, 3d ed., 1898, London, pp. 558-9, suggests that Gwion was probably the person mentioned among the warriors enumerated in the story of Kulhwch, where we read of Gwion the Cat-eyed. Rhŷs, however, fails to furnish evidence sufficient to establish this identification.

ter Gwynn or Gwion. What, then, may be logical inferences concerning this character Gwion Bach? That he is either identical with, or a development solely from, Gwynn ap Nudd appears improbable for two reasons: (1) the two characters are in no respect similar; (2) the tradition of the thumb of knowledge is attached to Gwion Bach, and has never, as far as is known, been associated with Gwynn ap Nudd. That Gwion Bach, Finn mac Cumaill, and Gwynn ap Nudd may be traced along independent lines to a common source, and that Gwion Bach and Finn mac Cumaill, each independent of the other, brought with him a thumb of knowledge which had been attached to their common progenitor, while Gwynn ap Nudd did not, seems unlikely, since Gwion Bach is apparently known only in connexion with stories related to the *Hanes Taliesin,* while the tradition of his magic finger appears only in the introduction of that tale itself. On the whole, the facts seem to point toward a conclusion that for the source of the episode of the burned finger in connexion with Gwion Bach one must look to the Irish Finn. But what may be said of the relationship between Gwion Bach and Gwynn ap Nudd? An examination of the numerous stories preserved in Welsh tradition reveals a number of characters bearing the name *Gwynn.*[64] Furthermore, not only are many of these Gwynns rather hazy conceptions, but a considerable confusion exists concerning the relationships between them. In fact, albeit an extremely prominent character in Welsh tradition, Gwynn ap Nudd himself is a somewhat shadowy figure. On the basis of these facts it seems

[64] See J. Loth, *Les Mabinogion,* II (Paris, 1889), Index, *s.v.* "Gwynn."

not unreasonable to conjecture that among these Gwynns there are to be found outgrowths from a central conception, Gwynn ap Nudd. It also appears not improbable that Gwion Bach, although so modified in character that he retains little resemblance except his name, is a development from Gwynn ap Nudd. In conformity with such an assumption, it might be conjectured that, since Gwynn ap Nudd may be equated with Finn mac Cumaill, Gwion Bach—evolved from Gwynn ap Nudd—attracted to himself certain Irish traditions relative to Finn and Oisin, including the one respecting Finn's thumb of knowledge; and Gwion Bach became so modified that he finally bore little resemblance either to Gwynn ap Nudd or to Finn mac Cumaill. On the other hand, it appears not improbable that—since Gwynn ap Nudd might be equated with Finn mac Cumaill—Gwion Bach was a sheer invention, his name and existence derived from Gwynn ap Nudd and his character adapted to fit not only certain traditions relating to Finn and Oisin but also certain situations arising in other stories. The episode relating to the burned finger would thus be traceable to the tradition of the thumb of knowledge belonging to the illustrious Finn; and the story purporting to account for Gwion's magic finger through the three drops from Caridwen's cauldron might be considered a tale created from Welsh materials and adapted to fit the borrowed Irish episode.

An attempt to establish the relationship between Oisin and Taliesin leads to even greater confusion. Nutt and, apparently, MacCulloch rely upon Rhŷs as authority for an etymological equation of the two

names.[65] Rhŷs likewise held, and Nutt seemed to favour, the idea that the two characters were identical because of the history.[66] On the whole, the words *Oisin* (*Ossín*) and *Taliesin* (*Taliessin, Telyessin*) do not appear to be cognates,[67] nor do the two characters show sufficient resemblance to establish even a probable identity, either as personalities or in point of traditional stories concerning them.

Unlike any tales connected with Oisin are the traditions relating to Taliesin which, in part at least, furnish a foundation for the *Hanes Taliesin*. According to the poem *Kat Godeu*,[68] the speaker enumerates a number of forms in which he has existed—an eagle, a book, a bridge, a coracle on the seas, a sword, a string in a harp, etc. The close similarity of the existences and transformations claimed by the speaker, presumably Taliesin, in this poem, to those claimed by Amairgen in the very ancient, possibly eighth-century,[69] Irish poem, was long ago noted by M. d'Arbois de Jubainville, who held that "le poème gallois altère le sens primitif de la formule, en mettant au passé le verbe qui est au présent dans le vieux texte irlandais."[70] Whether this version of Taliesin's existence in various forms was made in imitation of some such story as that of Amairgen or Mongan, or whether it goes back to

[65] See notes 39, 47, 61, and text, *supra*.

[66] Rhŷs, *Academy*, XXVII (Jan. 17, 1885), 46. See also notes 9, 38, 46, and text, *supra*.

[67] See note 9, and text, *supra*.

[68] See note 12, and text, *supra*.

[69] See note 20, and text, *supra*.

[70] *Le Cycle mythologique irlandais et la mythologie celtique*, Paris, 1884, p. 246.

the "hypothetical Goidels of Britain," remains matter of doubt.[71]

Another poem, also from the Book of Taliesin, sheds considerably more light upon the origin of the *Hanes Taliesin.* According to this, Taliesin declares that he has been a young salmon, a hound, a buck on the mountain, and a "grain in the furrow's womb;" and he further declares that "there received me a hen, ruddy-clawed, with a divided comb. I rested nine nights in her womb a child."[72] As Nutt suggested,[73] the poem

[71] Concerning the story relating to Mongan, see note 21, and text, *supra.*

Little is known concerning the renowned Taliesin. According to a more or less widespread tradition, he was the bard *par excellence* of Wales and flourished during the sixth century. Rhŷs considered him a mythical figure, and Nutt seems to have been in accord with this belief; see notes 37, 49, and text, *supra.* J. Gwenogvryn Evans (*The Book of Taliesin, Facs. and Text,* 1910, pp. iii, xxix; cf. Evans, *Poems from the Book of Taliesin,* Tremvan, Llanbedrog, 1915, p. xiii) holds that Taliesin was a real person who flourished in the middle of the twelfth century, and he accordingly concludes that Taliesin may very well have heard these lines from an Irishman or Irish scholar. He further suggests that the creative parallelism between Taliesin and Amairgen is too close to be a mere coincidence, especially when we remember that Gruffydd ap Cynan, born of an Irish mother, could not grow up among the culture and traditions of an Irish court without acquiring and spreading them. [For information concerning Gruffydd ap Cynan, see Arthur Jones, *The History of Gruffydd ap Cynan,* Manchester, 1910.] Concerning this matter, however, see Sir John Morris-Jones, *Y Cymmrodor,* XXVIII (1918), 37 ff., 245 ff., who takes vigorous exception to certain conclusions which Evans expresses. Concerning the poems by Amairgen and Taliesin which relate to existence in different forms, he may thus be quoted: "I am not aware that anyone but Dr. Evans has suggested that either the Welsh or the Irish bard has borrowed from the other; the relation between them is that they have both inherited the same traditions, the existence of which in Britain is as certain as in Ireland, and, as we shall see, more directly attested."

[72] See note 11, and text, *supra.*

[73] See note 45, and text, *supra.*

and the prose introduction of the *Hanes Taliesin* obviously relate to the same tradition, and the poem presupposes a story the incidents of which were familiar to the poet's hearers. A comparison of the details of the *Hanes Taliesin* with those of this early composition, however, at once suggests that, although they may refer to the same tradition, the *Hanes Taliesin* and the thirteenth-century tale upon which our poem was based were, in all probability, very unlike in treatment. According to the *Hanes Taliesin,* three drops of the liquid from Caridwen's cauldron fell on Gwion's finger, and, putting his finger into his mouth to relieve the pain, he attained supernatural wisdom. In an attempt to escape the enraged sorceress, he fled, first as a hare, then as a fish, then as a bird, but with each of these changes of form Caridwen converted herself into the shape of an animal capable of pursuit. Finally, Gwion changed himself into a grain of wheat; Caridwen became a hen and swallowed him; and he was afterward reborn of Caridwen as Taliesin. In this story the changes of form are merely details of a combat, and, as MacCulloch asserts, the *motif* of the episode is without doubt a "transformation combat." It should further be noted that this part which deals with the successive transformations of Gwion Bach and Caridwen forms merely a brief episode at the beginning of the complete tale.

The fourteenth-century poem, cited above, records that Taliesin had been a young salmon, a hound, a stag, etc., and that he had finally become a grain of wheat which was eaten by a hen. Except for such suggestion as is carried in the idea that the hen swallowed the

grain of wheat, there is not the slightest hint that these transformations were in any way connected with the idea of escape or combat. What, then, may have been the nature of the tradition presupposed by the poem containing the episode of the hen and the grain of wheat? To what extent did it resemble the tale preserved in the introduction of the *Hanes Taliesin?* What was its relationship to the "transformation combat" *motif,* and what may be said of the origin and development of such a tradition? These seem to be points in question.

In connexion with an attempt to ascertain the nature of the tradition presupposed by this fourteenth-century poem which contains the episode relating to the hen and the grain of wheat, one should note certain statements from other poems preserved in the Book of Taliesin. In one of the poems, contained not only in the Book of Taliesin but also in the Red Book of Hergest, Taliesin is credited with the assertion, "I am Gwion." Statements preserved in other poems ascribed to Taliesin may be quoted as follows:[74]

"Gwion opens his mouth—
an accident his song."

"I will ask the Lord
to consider my muse:
He sustained her need
before the days of Ceridwen."

"The boilings of the cauldron
of the five sciences will run over:
(this overflow), Gwion's stream,
. . . . . ."

[74] Concerning these statements, including the assertion "I am Gwion," and the poems in which they are preserved, see notes 15-18, and text, *supra.*

These statements clearly indicate that a number of the details included in the *Hanes Taliesin* were in existence prior to the fourteenth century and formed a part of the mythical history of Taliesin reflected in the poems ascribed to him. They do not show, however, that the legendary story of Taliesin which underlay these poems, or, indeed, that part of it which concerns the hen and the grain of wheat, was at all similar to the tale recorded in the introduction of the *Hanes Taliesin*. Furthermore, neither these poems according to which Taliesin asserts that he has existed in various forms, nor that which contains the episode of the hen and the grain of wheat, offers any definite assurance that the transformations mentioned were in any way related to a *motif* of a "transformation combat."

Again, except for the transformation effected through the medium of the hen, the transformations recorded of Taliesin in this poem are, in their general nature, identical with those recorded of him in the *Kat Godeu* and with those of Amairgen and Mongan in Irish lore.[75] In fact, the tale of Taliesin's existence in various forms as preserved in this poem, including, indeed, the feature of rebirth contained in the episode of the hen and the grain of wheat, is practically identical

[75] No such incident of rebirth as is preserved in this poem (the passage relating to the hen and the grain of wheat) exists either in the version of the transformations of Taliesin in the *Kat Godeu* or in the Irish stories concerning Amairgen or Mongan. Such a rebirth idea is, however, in general features, not sufficiently unlike certain early Irish rebirth tales, notably the rebirth of Lug as Cuchulinn, the rebirth of Etain, that of Tuan mac Cairill, etc., to preclude the possibility that a feature of this kind had been blended with tales similar to those recorded of Amairgen and Mongan. For these stories of Amairgen and Mongan, as well as those concerning Cuchulinn and Etain, see notes 20-28, and text, *supra*.

with the story of Tuan mac Cairill preserved in ancient Irish texts.[76] It appears not unlikely that tales of this nature are merely highly developed forms of primitive beliefs in shape-shifting and magic such as are found among all primitive peoples. Even in the Irish story concerning the two swineherds,[77] a tale which undoubtedly partakes of the nature of a "transformation combat," it does not appear that the changes of form experienced by the two combatants were effected either for purposes of escape or as a means of increasing their fighting powers. It does appear, on the other hand, that these changes of form were similar in nature to those experienced by Amairgen and Mongan, and that the two antagonists merely continued their combat through the changes which they underwent. It seems wholly possible, however, that the Irish tale of the two swineherds may be a development from some basic story *motif* to which may also be traced the "transformation combat" as it at present exists.

Other facts connected with the poem which includes the incident of the hen and the grain of wheat should likewise be noted. First, it contains no allusion to Gwion and no suggestion of relationship between Gwion and Taliesin. Then, there is no reference to Caridwen, no hint that the hen is Caridwen, no suggestion of any affinity between Caridwen and Taliesin, and nothing to prompt a belief that the hen plays the part of an enemy.[78] Apparently, she is nothing more than a hen serving as a host in which the final transformation takes place. Again, the animals named in this

[76] See note 28, and text, *supra*.
[77] See note 25, and text, *supra*.
[78] See note 11, and text, *supra*.

poem as those in which Taliesin existed are not the ones mentioned in the *Hanes Taliesin,* nor are they such as might naturally be suggested for parts in a "transformation combat." Finally, the absence of any indication in the poem that Taliesin's existence in different forms was at all connected with the idea of combat or of escape is in sharp contrast with statements found in poems incorporated in the *Hanes Taliesin,* one of which asserts, "I have fled as a frog, I have fled in the semblance of a crow," etc.[79] If the basic tale

[79] This poem runs as follows (*The Mabinogion,* ed. Guest, III [1849], 362):

"First, I have been formed a comely person,
In the court of Ceridwen I have done penance;
Though little I was seen, placidly received,
I was great on the floor of the place to where I was led;
I have been a prized defence, the sweet muse the cause,
And by law without speech I have been liberated
By a smiling black old hag, when irritated
Dreadful her claim when pursued:
I have fled with vigour, I have fled as a frog,
I have fled in the semblance of a crow, scarcely finding rest;
I have fled vehemently, I have fled as a chain,
I have fled as a roe into an entangled thicket;
I have fled as a wolf cub, I have fled as a wolf in a wilderness,
I have fled as a thrush of portending language;
I have fled as a fox, used to concurrent bounds of quirks;
I have fled as a martin, which did not avail:
I have fled as a squirrel, that vainly hides,
I have fled as a stag's antler, of ruddy course,
I have fled as iron in a glowing fire,
I have fled as a spear-head, of woe to such as has a wish for it;
I have fled as a fierce bull bitterly fighting,
I have fled as a bristly boar seen in a ravine,
I have fled as a white grain of pure wheat,
On the skirt of a hempen sheet entangled,
That seemed of the size of a mare's foal,
That is filling like a ship on the waters;
Into a dark leathern bag I was thrown,
And on a boundless sea I was set adrift;

presupposed by this fourteenth-century poem had borne a close resemblance to the story preserved in the introduction of the *Hanes Taliesin,* it seems reasonable to assume that certain major aspects of the story, e.g., hints concerning Gwion, Caridwen, or allusions relating to combat or flight, would be reflected in it. On the whole, it appears highly probable that the tradition which served as a basis for this poem did not include a "transformation combat," nor did it bear a close resemblance to the story preserved in the introduction of the prose work. Furthermore, none of the other early Welsh poems has any suggestion that the changes of form experienced by Taliesin were in any way related to the idea of escape or of combat. On the basis of the foregoing considerations, it seems relatively safe to conjecture that the "transformation combat" was not present in the pre-fourteenth-century mythical history of Taliesin reflected in any of these poems. It likewise seems safe to conjecture that the transformations recorded of Taliesin in these early verses, including the poem containing the episode of the hen and the grain of wheat, are reflections of tales made in imitation of Irish originals—e.g., such tales as are related of Amairgen, Mongan, or Tuan mac Cairill—or of similar Welsh tales which may be traced along independent lines to

Which was to me an omen of being tenderly nursed,
And the Lord God then set me at liberty."

Although some of the matter incorporated in this and other poems included in the *Hanes Taliesin* may be very old, the fact that the story told in the verse somewhat resembles that related in the prose prompts a belief that parts of the verse preserved in the *Hanes Taliesin* are no older than the prose narrative in which they are imbedded. It will be observed that the fourteenth-century poem containing the episode of the hen and the grain of wheat has no such allusions to flight as occur in the poem quoted.

the source of these Irish stories, and that they have no close relationship with the *motif* of the "transformation combat" as it appears in the *Hanes Taliesin.*

Although it seems clear that the "transformation combat" which forms part of the *Hanes Taliesin* was not reflected in these early poems, certain other features which appear in the prose story undoubtedly formed a part of the pre-fourteenth-century tradition upon which these verses were based. The statements, "I am Gwion" and "Gwion opens his mouth, an accident his song," which occur in poems ascribed to Taliesin preserved in the Book of Taliesin, make it relatively certain that the tradition regarding Gwion's rebirth as the bard was extant in these earlier times.[80]

The exact significance of the statement concerning the Lord having sustained his muse "before the days of Ceridwen" is obscure. A passage concerning Cyridwen [*sic*] which occurs in a poem preserved in the twelfth-century Black Book of Caermarthen indicates that she was thought to be a goddess of seeds, including "the various seeds of poetic harmony, the exalted speech of the graduated minstrel."[81] Evidently, as Skene asserts, Caridwen (Cyridwen, Ceridwen, Cariadwen) "is generally considered to be the goddess or personification of Nature in the so-called mythology of the Welsh. She is sometimes represented as the inspirer of poetry, hence *'pair Ceridwen'* or the cauldron of Ceridwen—

[80] Concerning these statements and the poems in which they are found, see notes 15-18, and text, *supra.*

[81] Skene, *The Four Ancient Books of Wales,* I (1868), 500. On the date of The Black Book of Caermarthen, see *ibid.,* p. 3.

is often used by the bards for the fountain of poetic inspiration. . . . ."[83]

One would naturally expect to find bits of lore concerning Caridwen, the inspirer of poetry, and Caridwen's cauldron, the fountain of poetic inspiration, in the mythical history of a traditional Welsh bard; but one should note that the sorceress Caridwen who plays a part in the *Hanes Taliesin* appears to be very different from the goddess Caridwen reflected in these early poems. The significance of the statement, also given in a poem preserved in the Book of Taliesin, "The boilings of the cauldron . . . . . Gwion's stream," is likewise obscure.[84] Though it might be argued that it is a reflection of the incident in the *Hanes Taliesin* which concerns Gwion's tending of the cauldron and the bursting thereof, and, in such case, might postulate the existence of the episode of the finger of knowledge in Welsh tradition previous to the fourteenth century, the evidence does not seem to point in that direction. The verse states that the overflow from the cauldron of the five sciences, "Gwion's stream," will produce fine weather, white clover, and honey. In the prose narrative it is related that the bursting of the cauldron of the sorceress was caused by the poisonous contents thereof, and that the liquid which escaped ran into a brook and poisoned Gwyddno's horses.[85] On the whole, these two ideas do not fit well together, and it appears

[83] Skene, *The Four Ancient Books of Wales,* II (1868), 324. Cf. *The Mabinogion,* ed. Guest, III (1849), 396; D. W. Nash, *Taliesin; or the Bards and Druids of Britain,* 1858, pp. 186 ff., 195 ff.; MacCulloch, *The Religion of the Ancient Celts,* 1911, pp. 381 ff.

[84] See note 18, and text, *supra.*

[85] See notes 2, 18, and text, *supra.*

relatively certain that the tradition underlying this verse passage was very different from the episode preserved in the *Hanes Taliesin*. Yet, it seems not improbable that the tradition reflected in the verse passage was the basis upon which, when transformed, garbled, and supplied with accretions, the incident which relates to Caridwen's cauldron as narrated in the *Hanes Taliesin* developed. Altogether, there seems to be no reason for an assumption that the incident concerning Gwion's burned finger formed a part of the tradition reflected in the verse.

In an attempt to formulate a tentative explanation of the *Hanes Taliesin* as it has come down to us, certain points hitherto unnoted in this investigation should also be considered. An examination of the opinions cited above shows that they agree in concluding that in its present form the *Hanes Taliesin* is a relatively late composition; and a pertinent passage from the manuscript of Anthony Powel of Llwydarth may thus be summarized:[85]

> Taliesin, chief of the Bards, and Elffin, the son of Urien, were once fishing at sea in a skin coracle, when an Irish pirate ship seized the bard and his coracle and bore him away toward Ireland. While the pirates were in a state of drunken mirth, Taliesin pushed his coracle into the sea, got into it, and, with a shield which he found in the ship, rowed until he neared land. Through the wildness of the waves he lost his shield, and the coracle was driven at the mercy of the sea until it stuck in the weir of Gwyddno, Lord of Ceredigion, where he was found by

[85] *Iolo Manuscripts*, ed. and tr. by Taliesin Williams, Publ. for the Welsh Manuscripts Society, 1848, pp. 71-2, 458-9. Cf. *The Mabinogion*, ed. Guest, III (1849), 390 ff.

Gwyddno's fishermen. Gwyddno soon learned that Taliesin was a bard, and Taliesin consented to become the tutor of the Lord's son. Several years later the territory of Gwyddno was overwhelmed by the sea, whereupon Taliesin became attached to Emperor Arthur's court at Caerlleon upon Usk. After Arthur's death he returned to the estate given him by Gwyddno, taking Gwyddno's son under his protection. "It was from this account that Thomas, the son of Einion Offeiriad, descended from Gruffudd Gwyr, formed his romance of Taliesin, the son of Cariadwen,—Elffin, the son of Goddnou,—Rhun, the son of Maelgwn Gwynedd,—and the operations of the Cauldron of Ceridwen."[86]

In a discussion of this and other stories concerning Taliesin, Lady Guest wrote as follows:[87]

"The various poems recited in the Tale of Taliesin appear to have been composed at different periods, and it is not improbable that the above mentioned Thomas ab Einion Offeiriad, collected the poems attributed to Taliesin, which were in existence before his time, and added others, to form the Mabinogi, which, from expressions in pages 360 and 361 [*The Mabinogion,* ed. Guest, III (1849)], and the very numerous transformations stated in the poetry, but not given in the prose, must have been much more complete than in its present state.

"That the story of Taliesin was current in the middle ages is well known. If proof were

[86] A story similar to the one narrated here is preserved in a manuscript which was once in the Havod Uchtryd collection, though it does not include the passage concerning Thomas ab Einion Offeiriad; see *The Mabinogion,* ed. Lady Guest, III (1849), 391-2. For other tales from Welsh manuscripts concerning the history of Taliesin, see Lady Guest, *op. cit.,* pp. 390 ff.

[87] *Op. cit.,* p. 394.

wanting, the lines of Llywarch Prydydd Moch, in allusion to the liberation of Elphin, might be adduced. They occur in an ode to Llywelyn ap Iorwerth, composed probably not later than 1220."

And, again:[88]

"From several poems being addressed to Hopkin ap Thomas ab Einawn, by Davydd y Coed, Iorwerth Llwyd, and others who flourished about the years 1300 to 1350, it may be inferred that Hopkin's father, the above Thomas ab Einiawn, was contemporary with Llywarch Prydydd y Moch, and therefore not the author but merely the compiler of the already well-known story of Caridwen, Taliesin, and Elphin."

Certain views of W. F. Skene concerning the *Hanes Taliesin* are as follows:[89]

"No copy of this tale is to be found in the Red Book of Hergest at all, and as that valuable MS. contains all the other prose tales of that period, this of itself is an argument against its authenticity.

"But, moreover, no copy of it is to be found in any known MS. prior to the eighteenth century. Dr. Owen Pughe, who published it in 1833, says explicitly that there was but one version of the prose narrative, and that version was furnished by Iolo Morganwg. Every notice regarding it upon which Mr. Nash founds emanates from him, and is not to be found elsewhere.[90] Even if we accept the account given

[88] *Ibid.*, p. 395.

[89] *The Four Ancient Books of Wales*, I (1868), 192 ff.

[90] D. W. Nash, *Taliesin; or the Bards and Druids of Britain*, 1858, pp. ix ff., held certain views concerning the age of the *Hanes Taliesin*. It was in refutation of Nash's assertions and opinions that Skene made these declarations. See, how-

by Dr. Owen Pughe, his explicit statement is, that it was composed by Hopkin Thomas Philip, and it cannot be taken farther back than 1590 or 1600, long after every poem we are dealing with had been transcribed; but its history is so questionable as to lead to the suspicion that it had no earlier origin than the school which produced it, and it is quite as necessary for Mr. Nash, before he can legitimately found upon it, to bridge over the interval between Einion Offeiriad in the thirteenth century, if he lived then, or if he ever lived at all, and Dr. Owen Pughe in the nineteenth, as it is for the advocates of the authenticity of the poems to bridge over the interval between the sixth century [the traditional date of Taliesin's activity] and the Black Book of Caermarthen. So much for the prose narrative."

Concerning the poems imbedded in the prose narrative, Skene declared:[81]

"With regard to the poems imbedded in it, whether naturally or artificially, the text published by Dr. Pughe in 1833 contains eleven poems; that published by Lady Charlotte Guest in 1849, fourteen, but in the notes we are informed that four of these poems were added to her edition from the Myvyrian Archaeology, and were not in the MSS. from which she printed. Now, of these eleven poems contained in the MSS. of the prose tale printed by Dr. Owen Pughe and Lady Charlotte Guest, not one is to be found in the Book of Taliessin; and of the

ever, the edition and translation of the *Hanes Taliesin* by one who subscribed himself "Idrison" (*The Cambrian and Caledonian Quarterly Magazine*, V [1833], 198 ff.). If "Idrison" is Dr. Owen Pughe, he made the definite statement (p. 198) that the "compiler, Hopkin Thomas Phillip, wrote this piece about the year 1370."

[81] *Op. cit.*, pp. 193-194.

four poems which she added from the Myvyrian Archaeology, only two are in that Book.

"At the time, therefore, when the Book of Taliessin was transcribed, the poems inserted in the prose tale had either not been written, or were known to be spurious, and not to belong to the body of poems at that time attributed to Taliessin."

As has been noted above, Nutt believed that this redaction of the *Hanes Taliesin* may have taken place at the end of the sixteenth century, the traditional date of Hopkin ap Philip, to whom it is ascribed, although he was more inclined to place its composition in the late fourteenth century. From the evidence at hand it appears impossible to establish any reasonably certain conclusions concerning the date or details of composition or even regarding the author of this tale in its present form. It is relatively certain that the *motif* of the "transformation combat" as it appears in the introduction of the *Hanes Taliesin* is not reflected in the poems preserved in the fourteenth-century Book of Taliesin, and it is equally clear that the character of Caridwen as depicted in the *Hanes Taliesin* is not the character of Caridwen as reflected in the poems contained in the Book of Taliesin. Although certain episodes which appear in the prose tale are reflected in poems contained in a manuscript of the early fourteenth century,[92] nothing in these poems would tend to es-

[92] In addition to the passages cited in the discussion above (notes 80-84, and text, *supra*), two lines from a poem ascribed to Taliesin and preserved in the Book of Taliesin may be quoted:

"I liberated my lord, in the presence of the gentry,
Elffin, the prince of the nobles:"

This passage obviously relates to some tale in which Taliesin liberated Elphin, possibly the episode found in the *Hanes*

tablish even the slightest probability that the *Hanes Taliesin* was extant at that time in anything like its present form. Furthermore, no poem imbedded in the prose tale is preserved in the Book of Taliesin; nor is the poem in the *Hanes Taliesin* which relates to the different forms in which Taliesin had existed, similar in nature to poems on the same subject as found in the fourteenth-century manuscript.

Although, as has been indicated above, it appears impossible to establish with any great degree of certainty conclusions concerning the date or the details of composition or regarding the author of the *Hanes Taliesin* as it has come down to us, evidence presented in the foregoing pages points with a considerable measure of probability toward inferences respecting the general nature of its development. On the basis of these conclusions a tentative explanation of the development of the *Hanes Taliesin* may thus be presented:

> Taliesin was the traditional bard of Wales just as Amairgen and Oisin were traditional bards of Ireland, and, as was the case with the Irish Amairgen, so legends grew up about the Welsh bard investing him with attributes relating to existence in different forms. These legends may have been created in imitation of those concerning Amairgen, and, if Evans is right in his contention that Taliesin was a real personage who lived at a relatively late date,[98] it appears all the more likely that such was the case. On the other hand, these traditions con-

Taliesin. A similar allusion to the liberation of Elphin occurs in another poem ascribed to Taliesin. For an English translation of these two poems, see Evans, *Poems from the Book of Taliesin,* 1915, pp. 55, 61; cf. Skene, *The Four Ancient Books of Wales,* I (1868), 261, 275.

[98] See note 71, and text, *supra.*

cerning Taliesin may have had their origin in a source to which along independent lines the similar Irish traditions may likewise be traced. It also seems clear that at an early date legends which concerned existence in various forms and which culminated in a final rebirth, similar to the Irish story of Tuan mac Cairill, had grown up about the Welsh poet. Again, it appears not improbable that these tales were made in imitation of Irish originals, although they may be traceable along independent lines to a source in which similar Irish stories also found root. On foregoing pages it has been noted that, according to Irish tradition, Finn, the descendant of Núada, was the father of Oisin, the bard. It has likewise been noted that the Irish Finn, descendant of Núada, may be equated with the Welsh Gwynn ap Nudd. Since, then, Oisin, son of Finn, was the traditional bard of Ireland just as Taliesin was the traditional bard of Wales, the assumption that similar legends should grow up about the two figures is not at all unreasonable. In fact, it appears highly probable that, in imitation of the Irish tradition, a legend developed in Wales inventing Gwion Bach, apparently a reflection of Gwynn ap Nudd—who, in turn, might be equated with Finn mac Cumaill—to take the place of the Irish Finn in a Gwion-Taliesin imitation of the Finn-Oisin relationship. As in the cases above, however, there seems to be a possibility that the Irish Finn-Oisin and the Welsh Gwion (<Gwynn)-Taliesin traditions may be traced independently to a common source.

It therefore appears that before the end of the thirteenth century a mass of lore had become associated with the name *Taliesin*. This included traditions concerning his existence in various forms, which may have been imitations of Irish

tales such as had been related of Amairgen and Mongan, or possibly developments from older Welsh traditions which might be traced along independent lines to a source in which the Irish stories of Amairgen and Mongan likewise originated. These bits of lore are reflected in the *Kat Godeu* and other poems of a similar nature preserved in Welsh documents of the early fourteenth century. The lore attached to the name *Taliesin* also contained a story which concerned Taliesin's existence in different forms and included a final rebirth episode, viz., the incident relating to the hen and the grain of wheat. This story may have been created in imitation of some Irish tale such as is preserved in the story of Tuan mac Cairill, or it may have been a Welsh survival of a tale which might be traced along independent lines to a source common to this Welsh tale and to other stories similar to that of Tuan mac Cairill. It is highly probable, moreover, that the tales concerning existence in different forms, such as are recorded of Amairgen and Mongan, and such stories as that related of Tuan mac Cairill, spring from the same root. The tale of Tuan mac Cairill, and, indeed, that of Taliesin as recorded in the poem containing the episode of the hen and the grain of wheat, may, however, have resulted from the blending of a rebirth incident with a story of existence in different forms similar to those which concern Mongan, Amairgen, and Taliesin as recorded in the *Kat Godeu*. On the whole, however, it appears more likely that traditions such as are preserved in the poem ascribed to Amairgen and in the *Kat Godeu* are merely reflections of parts of stories which in their complete forms more nearly resemble the story of Tuan mac Cairill and the poem containing the episode of the hen and the grain of

wheat. Furthermore, included in this mass of lore concerning Taliesin were traditions which associated him with Caridwen, the goddess of poetic inspiration; which concerned his liberation of Elphin; and which made him a rebirth of Gwion Bach, a character who, apparently, grew out of a central conception, Gwynn ap Nudd, and who seems to have taken the place of Finn mac Cumaill—with whom Gwynn ap Nudd may be equated—in a Gwion-Taliesin imitation of a Finn-Oisin relationship. There is, however, the possibility, as has been previously indicated, that the Irish tradition regarding Finn the father of Oisin and the Welsh tradition of Gwion(<Gwynn) reborn as Taliesin may be independent developments from a common source. Although one might expect to find Gwion Bach, the Welsh equivalent of the Irish Finn in this Gwion-Taliesin parallel to the Finn-Oisin relationship, to be invested with certain traditions which had been associated with the Irish Finn, there is no evidence tending to establish even a conjecture that the tradition of the thumb of knowledge existed in Welsh lore before the fourteenth century.

Taken all in all, it appears relatively certain that the traditions enumerated above formed parts of the mass of lore which constituted the mythical history of Taliesin previous to the fourteenth century; and it is also highly probable that this mythic history contained many other traditions, including, perhaps, Gwion's tending of Caridwen's cauldron and the bursting thereof, Taliesin's adventures on the sea, his rescue, etc. If it may be assumed that such was the lore attached to the name *Taliesin* before the fourteenth century, it then appears that at some time subsequent to the end of the thirteenth century and prior to the end of the eight-

eenth, stories of Taliesin's existence in various forms, together with the pre-fourteenth-century story which included the episode of the hen and the grain of wheat, bearing as they do some resemblance to tales containing a "transformation combat" *motif,* were rearranged, remodeled, and blended with other traditions, which may or may not have concerned Taliesin, in the formation of a "transformation combat" story, probably in imitation of some "transformation combat" tale known to the composer, who lived subsequent to the thirteenth century. In the creation of such a story, the character of Caridwen, the goddess, was apparently changed into the character of Caridwen, the sorceress, wife of Tegid Voel. Gwion Bach, who apparently took the place of the Irish Finn in a Gwion-Taliesin parallel to, if not an imitation of, the Finn-Oisin relationship, and who was apparently a reflection of Gwynn ap Nudd—the Welsh equivalent of the Irish Finn—became the son of Gwreang of Llanfair and was invested with the tradition of the finger of knowledge, probably a borrowing —subsequent to the thirteenth century—from the Irish episode associated with the illustrious Finn. Using these modified traditions which dated from before the fourteenth century and interweaving tales relating to Taliesin's escape from Irish pirates, his liberation of Elphin, and various other traditions or figments of his imagination, the composer fashioned his "transformation combat" story of Taliesin's genesis and after-adventures.

In the creation and development of the story as it is preserved to us, however, more than one author may have figured. It is not impossible that part of the tale as it stands may have been written at one time, and that this part may have been modified, enlarged, and developed in the

hands of other composers until it attained its present form. Such an hypothesis is supported by the fact that certain poems imbedded in the prose narrative reflect a story which is not the tale preserved in the prose. On the other hand, the *Hanes Taliesin* in its present form may be a composition by one man, who, after the manner outlined above, created the narrative in the shape now known to us.

If Thomas ab Einion Offeiriad flourished in the thirteenth century, it seems safe to assume, since the "transformation combat" does not appear to be reflected in early texts, that he was not responsible for the features of the "transformation combat" in the *Hanes Taliesin.* It seems possible, however, that he may have been the composer of certain parts of the story, and such an assumption would account for the statement which appears in the manuscript of Anthony Powel of Llwydarth. That an early tale, containing, perhaps, the episodes enumerated in that manuscript, was enlarged, modified, changed to a "transformation combat" story, and embellished with new features by some one who lived later than the traditional date of Thomas ab Einion Offeiriad, possibly Hopkin ap Thomas ap Philip, who seems to have lived in the latter part of the sixteenth century, would account, likewise, for Pughe's positive assertion concerning the composer and, also, for the later date of composition.[94]

[94] See notes 88-91, and text, *supra.* According to the manuscript of Anthony Powel of Llwydarth, the romance was composed by Thomas ap Einion Offeiriad. Lady Guest held that Hopkin ap Thomas ab Einawn [*sic*] flourished about 1300-1350, and that the father of Hopkin, Thomas ab Einiawn Offeiriad, who collected the poems about Elphin, lived about the year 1220. Nash declared that the romance was composed by Thomas ab Einion Offeiriad in the thirteenth century, and Dr. Pughe asserted that Hopkin Thomas Phillip wrote the piece about

On the whole, the history of the *Hanes Taliesin* remains obscure. There is no positive proof that the episode of the finger of knowledge was present in Welsh tradition prior to its appearance in the eighteenth-century manuscript in which the *Hanes Taliesin* is preserved; there is no reason to suppose that this episode ever existed in that tradition, except for its appearance in some form of the *Hanes Taliesin* story; and there is only the slightest ground for belief that the *Hanes Taliesin* in its present form may be dated earlier than the end of the sixteenth century. On the basis of the evidence presented, however, it seems relatively safe to assume that the *Hanes Taliesin* was composed at some time later than the beginning of the fourteenth century; that it did not assume its present form before the end of the sixteenth century; that certain fragments of lore concerning Taliesin which had been existent in Welsh tradition before the fourteenth century, as well as bits from other sources, among which was the episode of the thumb of knowledge belonging to the Irish Finn, were woven into a "transformation combat" story sometime after the thirteenth century; and that neither the tradition of the finger of knowledge nor a true "transformation combat" *motif* was associated with Gwion or Taliesin in Welsh lore before the fourteenth century.

Regardless of conclusions concerning the history of this tale and without reference as to whether it could

1370. Skene makes the statement that Einion Offeiriad seems to have lived in the thirteenth century, if he ever lived at all; and Nutt held that the composition "may have taken place at the end of the sixteenth century, the traditional date of Hopkin ap Philip, to whom it is ascribed." He favoured the opinion, however, that the composition dated from the late fourteenth century.

be proved that the episode of the finger of knowledge had been associated with Gwion Bach in Welsh lore before the fourteenth century, three facts appear which make it relatively certain that the episode in the Welsh story is a borrowing from, or an imitation of, the tradition associated with the character of Finn mac Cumaill: (1) an idea that Finn became possessed of the power of divination through the insertion of his finger or thumb in his mouth was associated with the traditional character of Finn at a date prior to the tenth century; (2) tales purporting to explain the origin of Finn's magic finger or thumb may be found in texts of an equally early date; (3) no tradition concerning the inspiration of the power of divination through the insertion of the thumb or finger in the mouth and no episode explaining the origin of a magic finger have ever been associated, as far as is known, with Gwynn ap Nudd; and only in the one instance is such a power or such an episode associated with Gwion Bach. On the whole, there appears to be ample evidence for concluding that the episode of the finger of knowledge found in the *Hanes Taliesin* may be ascribed to an Irish source.

CHAPTER V

THE STORY OF FEARACHUR LEIGH AND THE WHITE SNAKE

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An episode which occurs in a story written down from Scottish oral tradition is undoubtedly related to the incident of the finger of knowledge preserved in the tales of Finn and in that of Taliesin. This story may be summarized as follows:[1]

> One day Farquhar, a drover, who was carrying a hazel staff in his hand, met a doctor, who asked him if he could find the tree from which he had cut the stick. Receiving an affirmative answer, the doctor asked that a wand from that tree be brought to him, and, having given Farquhar a bottle, he further directed him to hold the mouth of the bottle against a hole at the foot of the tree, to allow the first six serpents that came out to escape, but to imprison the seventh in the bottle. Farquhar did this, permitting six brown and barred snakes to go free, but the seventh, a white one, he captured in the bottle. Returning with his prize, Farquhar was asked by the doctor to aid him, and, building a fire with the hazel sticks, they put the snake into a pot to boil. The doctor bade Farquhar watch the pot, warning him that he should permit no one to touch it nor should he allow any steam to escape from it. Paper was wrapped about the lid of the pot, but, when the water began to boil, steam came forth at one place. Farquhar used his finger to push the paper down and then put

[1] See J. F. Campbell, *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, new ed., London, II (1890), 377 ff. The tale was collected from oral tradition in Sutherland in April, 1860.

his finger into his mouth, for it was wet with the "bree." Lo! He knew everything, and the eyes of his mind were opened. Presently the doctor came back and took the pot from the fire. Having dipped his finger into the steam-drops, he sucked it; but the virtue had gone out of the brew, and it was no more than water to him. Farquhar now set up as a great doctor —no secret was hidden from him, and he could cure every illness. Subsequently he healed the king of a very mysterious disease. The king's own doctors, in order to keep the ruler ill, "put at whiles a black beetle into the wound in the [king's] knee, and the beast was eating the bone and his flesh, and made him cry day and night. This [fact] Farquhar knew by the serpent's wisdom that he had, *when he laid his finger under his teeth* [italics mine]; and the king was cured, and had all his doctors hung." Thereupon, the ruler gave his daughter to Farquhar in marriage, but some time later the one-time drover died, poisoned by an ill-wisher.

A similar story is recorded of Sir James Ramsay of Banff:[a]

> Sir James, banished from his country, went to France or Spain, where, one day, he met an old doctor, who engaged him as an apprentice. Acting under the directions of his employer, Sir James captured a white snake, which the doctor told him to take into a vault and there stew until it was turned into oil. Sir James stewed the serpent according to directions, but in pouring off the oil he burned his fingers. Thrusting them into his mouth to ease the pain, he found that his eyes had been opened and that he could

[a] Robert Chambers, *Popular Rhymes of Scotland*, 3d ed., Edinburgh, 1847, pp. 226 ff. Cf. J. G. Frazer, *The Archaeological Review*, I (1888), 177, note.

see through everything. Sir James became a skilful doctor because "he could clearly see what was wrang in folk's insides." Returning to Scotland, he cured the king of a mysterious illness by cutting a "ball o' hair out of his inside" without his ever wakening; and as a reward the ruler gave his daughter to Sir James in marriage.

In this tale of Sir James Ramsay, no hazel is mentioned. Another version concerns Gilleadha, one of three brothers, all of whom were physicians, and is as follows:[3]

Gilleadha was an "herbalist" and was employed by his brother Fergus to gather herbs and prepare them for use. One day he was boiling a cauldron of herbs in which a white snake had been placed, and the bubbling liquor spattered his hand. Having licked this liquor off, "at once he got such a view of his profession as to make him unrivalled." He was once called to see a young girl who was suffering, and, as he approached the house, a servant who accompanied him called his attention to a sweet female voice singing a song. The doctor, hearing the girl's voice, knew what her disease was and, having ordered that a sheep be killed and roasted, placed her close beside the roasting sheep. Very soon, a toad which she had swallowed came out of her mouth, tempted by the flavour of the cooking meat, and she was cured. Later, he was summoned to attend one of the Scottish kings, who was healed by him; but he himself finally died from poison administered at the instigation of other doctors who were jealous of him.

[3] Summarized from Campbell, *op. cit.*, pp. 381-2.

A story similar in some respects to these recorded above is told of Michael Scott:[4]

> Attacked by a white snake, Michael Scott killed it, dividing it into three pieces with one blow. His landlady offered a reward for the middle piece and, having received it, waited until she thought all were asleep, when she cooked it in a saucepan, dipping her finger into the pan at intervals, whereupon the cock crew. Scott, who had been watching her, out of curiosity dipped his finger into the sauce and applied it to his tongue, whereupon, at the crowing of the cock, he received superior wisdom.

The foregoing Scottish legends will at once be recognized as belonging to the group of stories regarding a white snake, which, in turn, seems to be a development from a large cycle of tales relating to the acquisition of supernatural powers through the medium of a serpent. Legends of this nature are numerous, are widely distributed, and differ greatly in details. According to stories found in the Tyrol, Dr. Theophrastus, a marvelous physician and master of the black art, caught a *haselwurm,* i.e., a white snake, the taste of which imparts a knowledge of the language of all creatures and so sharpens the eyes that the person who tastes the snake can see through rocks and deep down into the earth. Having captured the snake, Dr. Theophrastus directed his servant to cook it and further ordered that under no conditions should the servant taste the concoction. The servant disobeyed, however, and betrayed his acquired knowledge (the ability to

[4] W. Grant Stewart, *The Popular Superstitions and Festive Amusements of the Highlanders of Scotland,* Edinburgh, 1823, pp. 78 ff.

understand bird-speech) by laughing at the talk of two magpies, whereupon his master killed him.[5] In another version of this tale the servant betrays himself by his supernatural sight, and in another, by his knowledge of the language of plants, which, according to the latter story, shout aloud to the doctor regarding the medical properties which they respectively possess.[6] In a Swahili tale, a man becomes a great physician by drinking the second skimming of the cooked body of the King of Snakes; and it is also related that, when the trees of a certain island saw the King of Snakes approach, each spoke aloud concerning its medical properties.[7]

A story very similar to the Tyrolean tale of Dr. Theophrastus is found in Bohemia.[8] A Bavarian version relates that the servant substitutes something else

[5] Johann Nepomuk [Mahlschedl], Ritter von Alpenburg, *Mythen und Sagen Tirols,* 1857, pp. 302 ff.; cf. J. G. Frazer, *The Archaeological Review,* I (1888), 176, notes 119-20. Frazer suggests that Dr. Theophrastus is probably Paracelsus, whose real name was Theophrastus Bombast von Hohenheim, and calls attention to a Swabian legend printed by E. Meyer, *Deutsche Sagen, Sitten und Gebräuche aus Schwaben,* p. 224, which relates how Theophrastus Paracelsus got fern seed. According to a tradition preserved in a vast group of legends, the fern is a plant which has the power of imparting a knowledge of the language of animals. For information concerning stories relating to the acquisition of an ability to understand animal-speech through the medium of the white snake or the fern, see Frazer, *op. cit.,* pp. 164 ff.; M. R. Cox, *Cinderella,* London, 1893, p. 517. For further information concerning the tradition relating to man's acquisition of ability to understand the speech of animals, see the study by Antti Aarne, *Der tiersprachenkundige Mann und seine neugierige Frau* (*FF Communications,* 15 [1914]), pp. 1-81.

[6] Concerning these stories, see von Alpenburg, and Frazer, *loc. cit.*

[7] E. Steere, *Swahili Tales,* London, 1870, pp. 345, 361. Cf. Frazer, *loc. cit.*

[8] Frazer, *op. cit.,* p. 176, citing J. Grohmann, *Aberglaube und Gebräuche aus Böhmen und Mähren,* I (1864), sec. 1658.

for his master's consumption and eats the cooked snake himself, whereupon he is killed by his master.[9] According to an Austrian story, a servant, through tasting a white snake prepared for his master, acquires a knowledge of animal-language but betrays himself through his ability to understand the language of geese. This servant, however, is not killed.[10] A Breton story in which an understanding of bird-speech is acquired through tasting a white snake is very similar to the Scottish tale concerning Michael Scott.[11] According to this version, a workman lodged with an old woman reputed to be a witch, and one day brought her a snake which he had killed. She cooked the snake, and, during her momentary absence, the workman ate a piece of it, finding, as soon as he was out of doors, that he understood the language of birds. He thereupon told the old woman what had happened; but she breathed into his mouth, and he lost his ability to understand bird-speech.

Of the various tales concerning the white snake, the best known, perhaps, is that included in the collection of the Grimm brothers under the title "Die weisse Schlange." According to this story, a king, whose wisdom was very great, was accustomed to have a covered dish served to him each day after dinner; but no one knew the contents of the dish, not even the trusted servant who placed it on the table. One day, overcome by curiosity, the servant took the cover from the

[9] *Ibid.*, citing Sepp, *Altbayerischer Sagenschatz,* Munich, 1876, pp. 615 ff.

[10] *Ibid.*, citing A. Peter, *Volksthümliches aus Oesterreichisch-Schlesien,* II, 33 ff.

[11] P. Sébillot, *Traditions et superstitions de la Haute-Bretagne,* Paris, II (1882), 224.

dish, and, beholding a white snake therein, he tasted it. At once he understood what the sparrows were saying outside the window, for eating the serpent had given him the ability to understand the speech of animals. The remainder of the tale concerns the further adventures of this servant and the advantages which accrued to him through his sympathy for animals and his knowledge of their speech.[12] A Bohemian story, obviously a variant of "Die weisse Schlange," relates that an old woman came to the king, bringing a white snake in a basket, and told him that, if he ate of it, he would understand whatever was said by any animal on the earth, in the air, or in the water. Thereupon the king ordered his servant, George, to cook "this fish," forbidding him on pain of death to taste it. Although George thought it looked more like a snake than a fish, he cooked it, and, despite his master's prohibition, tasted it. Immediately he understood what the flies buzzing about the kitchen were saying, but finally betrayed himself by laughing at a remark made by a horse. The king, however, promised to deal mercifully with the erring servant if he would bring to him the golden-haired maiden. The remainder of the story concerns George's later adventures and has no bearing upon the subjects under consideration.[13] According to another German tale, a lord who lived near Göttingen knew a little of the animal-language. One day his servant brought to the castle a silver-white serpent instead of a fish; and since the lord knew that whoever ate of a white serpent would have a complete mastery

[12] *Kinder- und Hausmärchen,* gesammelt durch die Brüder Grimm, 17 ed., Berlin, 1880, No. 17, pp. 77 ff.

[13] A. H. Wratislaw, *Sixty Folk-Tales,* London, 1889, pp. 25 ff.

of the speech of animals, he ate of it, while the servant, contrary to his master's orders, tasted some of what was left. The lord soon heard birds saying that the castle would be destroyed; and when he asked the servant what the cock had said, the servant betrayed his knowledge of the bird-language. Thereupon the lord killed the servant; but that same day the castle sank into the ground, and the place whereon it stood became the Seeburger lake.[14] Yet another German tale relates that not far from Kroppenstädt very deep water covers a spot where a public-house once stood. One day a man and his servant came to this place, and a girl who had eaten of a serpent heard a cock say that the public-house would sink into the ground that very day at three o'clock. She told this to the servant, who, in turn, told it to his master; and the master and servant hurried away. That day the house sank, and the spot was covered with deep water.[15]

As evidence bearing on the antiquity of the Teutonic tradition which concerns acquisition of ability to understand animal-speech through eating a white serpent, a story recorded by Saxo Grammaticus may be summarized as follows:[16]

> Roller, peeping through a crack in his mother's hut, saw her stirring some food in a pot, above which hung three snakes, the mouths of

[14] See Die Brüder Grimm, *Deutsche Sagen,* 3d ed., H. Grimm, Berlin, I (1891), 103 ff. Cf. Frazer, *op. cit.,* p. 175.

[15] A. Kuhn and W. Schwartz, *Norddeutsche Sagen, Märchen und Gebräuche,* Leipzig, 1848, p. 154.

[16] *Historia Danica,* V, 129. Cf. Frazer, *op. cit.,* p. 174. See also *The First Nine Books of the Danish History of Saxo Grammaticus,* translated by Oliver Elton, with consideration of the sources, etc., by Frederick York Powell, London, 1894, pp. 157 ff.

which dripped moisture upon the food in the pot. Two of these snakes were black, and hung by a cord around their bellies. The third, which was fastened by its tail and hung rather higher than the others, seemed to have white scales. When they were at the table, and Kraka's son and stepson were about to eat together, she put before them a dish of food, part of which was dark, and part light because of the different colours of the snakes. When each had tasted the food, Erik turned the dish around, placing the dark portion of the food before himself, and the white portion, which had first been set before him, before Roller. By virtue of this food Erik attained the highest degree of human wisdom, which included an ability to understand animal-speech. When Kraka came and found that the dish had been turned around and that Erik had eaten the stronger part of the food, she grieved that the good fortune she had designed for her son should have been attained by her stepson.

In his discussion of this tale, Frazer observes that Saxo's attribution of this power to a black snake is unique and asserts that in all other cases, except one, where the colour is mentioned it is a white snake which possesses magic value. He further asserts, "We are almost led to conjecture that Saxo has interchanged the rôles of the black and white serpent."[17]

[17] *Op. cit.*, p. 174. In a note, *loc. cit.*, Frazer cites the one story which relates that a snake other than a white one possesses magic power. This is a tale found in Marmier's *Contes populaires de différents pays*, 2me sériè, p. 56, in which the serpent is blue with a green head. In Waldau's version, *Böhmisches Märchenbuch*, p. 13, of which Marmier's version appears to be an amplification, there is no mention of the colour. Frazer further states that the only example he knows of virtue attributed to a black snake is in *Panchatantra*, V, 12 (Benfey), where steam from a black snake boiling in a pot restores the sight of a blind man.

According to Pliny, Democritus stated that understanding of the speech of birds could be acquired by eating of a serpent.[18] Philostratus, in his *Life of Apollonius of Tyana,* records that the Arabs gained an understanding of the language of animals through eating the heart or liver of a serpent,[19] and also that certain peoples in India attained a knowledge of the language of animals by eating a dragon's (serpent's) heart or liver.[20] According to a German belief, whoever eats the flesh of a serpent can understand the language of birds,[21] and there is also a German, as well as a Bohemian, superstition that whoever eats the flesh of a serpent can understand the language of animals.[22] According to another belief, if one wishes to understand the speech of geese, he should sever and split the head of a white serpent, insert therein a pea, and bury the head in the ground. Thereafter, when the pea-vine grows from the head, the person who eats its first pod will understand the language of geese.[23] It is likewise a Bohemian superstition that one may understand the language of plants if he carries a *haselwurm* (white snake) with him.[24] According to a Tyrolean belief, a person may make himself invisible by carrying a white snake with him or by eating a white snake.[25] Although

[18] Pliny, *Nat. Hist.,* X, 137.
[19] Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.,* i, 20.
[20] *Ibid.,* iii, 9.
[21] Adolf Wuttke, *Der deutsche Volksaberglaube der Gegenwart,* 3d ed., Elard Hugo Meyer, Berlin, 1900, p. 116, § 153.
[22] *Ibid.,* p. 316, § 468.
[23] J. Grohmann, *Aberglaube und Gebräuche aus Böhmen und Mähren,* I (1864), 230. Cf. Wuttke, *op. cit.,* p. 316, §468; Frazer, *op. cit.,* pp. 177 ff.
[24] Grohmann, *op. cit.,* p. 202. Cf. Wuttke, *op. cit.,* p. 316, §468.
[25] Von Alpenburg, *Mythen und Sagen Tirols,* 1857, p. 378. Cf. Wuttke, *op. cit.,* p. 52, §58.

for the most part the *haselwurm* of Germanic tradition is a small white serpent which lives under the hazel bush,[26] certain tales depict it as a dragon-like creature which breathes fire and lives in the sea.[27] In Norway, Sweden, and Jutland, down to the present century, the flesh of the white snake was supposed to confer supernatural wisdom on the person who ate it.[28] In Wendish belief, a man who ate a white serpent understood what the birds said.[29] According to a Syrian story, the drinking of serpent water not only enables a person to understand the language of serpents and birds but renders him immune from the danger of snake bite.[30]

According to Apollodorus, young snakes befriended by Melampus licked the ears of their benefactor and gave him the ability to understand the speech of animals;[31] and Helenus and Cassandra gained supernatural powers in similar fashion.[32] Discussing these classical legends in which animal-speech is acquired through an animal's licking the ears, Frazer asserts: "This application of serpents to the ears seems to be exclusively

[26] See Chapter II, note 57, *supra.*

[27] Ulrich Jahn, *Volkssagen aus Pommern und Rügen,* Stettin, 1886, pp. 171 ff. Cf. Wuttke, *op. cit.,* p. 52, §58.

[28] Frazer, *op. cit.,* p. 174, citing Müller on Saxo Grammaticus, II, 146.

[29] W. von Schulenburg, *Wendische Volkssagen und Gebräuche aus dem Spreewald,* Leipzig, 1880, p. 96. Cf. Frazer, *op. cit.,* p. 173.

[30] Frazer, *op. cit.,* p. 173, citing E. Prym and A. Socin, *Syrische Sagen und Märchen,* pp. 150 ff.

[31] Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca,* I, ix, 11-12; Pliny, *Nat. Hist.,* X, 137. See also Scholion on Apollonius Rhodius, i, 118.

[32] Scholion on Euripides, *Hecuba,* 87; Scholion on Homer, *Iliad,* vii, 44; Tzetzes, Scholion on Lycophron, I, p. 266, ed. Müller.

classical; at least I have found no example of it outside of Greek and Latin literature."[33]

A glance at the Scottish tales cited above will at once reveal their relationships. In each, a person cooks a white snake for a doctor, burns his fingers in the operation, thrusts his finger or fingers into his mouth, and becomes a great physician through the supernatural knowledge acquired by tasting the snake. In each of the stories the title character heals the king: in the case of Sir James Ramsay, by cutting a "ball o' hair" out of the king, in that of Fearachur Leigh, by removing a black beetle from the king's knee; while Gilleadha performs a similar feat when he entices the toad from the mouth of the young woman. The tales exhibit further similarities in that Sir James Ramsay and Fearachur Leigh alike marry the daughters of their royal patients, and that Fearachur Leigh and Gilleadha are both poisoned. Without question, these three tales are merely differing versions of the same story; but an attempt to establish their interrelationships as regards their history and development would be of little value in the present connexion.

A question highly pertinent to this investigation, on the other hand, is the affinity of the Scottish tales to the Continental stories typified by the Tyrolese legend concerning Dr. Theophrastus, who, like the Scottish physicians, apparently achieved his great ability through tasting of a white snake. The Tyrolese tale states that

[33] Frazer, *The Archaeological Review*, I (1888), 168. For further information concerning the appearance of this tradition in classical lore, see Frazer's entire article, "The Language of Animals," *op. cit.*, pp. 81-181, to which, in the accumulation of material for this chapter, the present author is greatly indebted for bibliographical data.

eating such a serpent imparts knowledge of the language of all creatures and so sharpens the eyes that they can see through rocks and deep down into the earth;[34] while the tale of Sir James Ramsay relates that he put his fingers into his mouth to suck out the pain and found that his "een were opened, and that he could see through everything," and, again, that "he could see into his master's inside, and could tell a' that was going on there."[35] In the story of Dr. Theophrastus, the servant tastes the serpent and thus acquires a knowledge of bird-speech, not as the consequence of accidentally burning his fingers, but rather as the result of a wilful act. Although the servant who accidentally tastes the snake becomes the title character in the Scottish tales, in each case the master who directs the cooking of the snake is a doctor. It may also be noted that the story of Gilleadha relates that when the hero, accompanied by a servant, approached the house of the young woman to whom he had been called, the servant "remarked a sweet female voice which he heard singing a song," and the doctor, on listening to this voice, knew the nature of her malady.[36] These points concerning the servant (who, indeed, has no connexion with the story, but is the one who calls attention to the voice), the singing, and the fact that Gilleadha *knew from her voice* what was her disease, are suggestive of details regarding the servant and the ability to understand bird-speech in the story of Dr. Theophrastus.

On the whole, it appears highly probable that the

[34] See note 5, and text, *supra.*
[35] See note 2, and text, *supra.*
[36] See note 3, and text, *supra.*

Scottish tales of Fearachur Leigh, Sir James Ramsay, and Gilleadha, as well as the Continental stories similar to that of Dr. Theophrastus, belong in the same great group, of which "Die weisse Schlange" may be taken as a type. In the story of Dr. Theophrastus, the master is a doctor; in the other tales, he is a king or some other prominent personage. In stories of the nature of that of Dr. Theophrastus, as well as in those similar to "Die weisse Schlange," the master orders his servant to cook a white snake and forbids him to taste it. In both these types, the servant, not through accidentally burning his finger but through an act of will, tastes the forbidden dish, thereby acquiring a knowledge of the language of animals and, in consequence, the advantages of supernatural wisdom.[37] In both types, the servant betrays the fact that he has eaten of the forbidden dish through his ability to understand the speech of birds or animals, and in both types he is either killed or punished by his master for his disobedience. Apparently, tales of the Dr. Theophrastus type belong to a great group of stories of which legends of "Die weisse Schlange" type are also representative. In matters of origin and development, the interrelations between these two groups are obscure; but one is tempted to conjecture that, influenced by the connexion of the serpent with the art of healing in primitive as well

[37] Although in most Continental tales of this character the power attained through eating the flesh of a white serpent is an understanding of the speech of birds, and frequently of the speech of animals in general, there are tales in which the person who eats the white snake acquires supernatural wisdom, e.g., the story from Saxo Grammaticus, note 16, and text, *supra*, and the statements by Müller, note 28, and text, *supra*. See also the story of Dr. Theophrastus, according to which the person who eats a white snake is gifted with supernatural vision, notes 5, 34, and text, *supra*.

as in classical lore—witness the association of the serpent with Aesculapius[38]—stories typified by the tale concerning Dr. Theophrastus were developments from those represented by "Die weisse Schlange," which, in turn, seems to be evolved from the tradition that through eating an animal one acquires the powers possessed by it.

It will further be noted that the Breton story in which the old woman cooks the snake for the workman is markedly similar to the Scottish tale concerning Michael Scott. In both stories a man lodges with an old woman, kills a snake, brings it home, gives it to her, and she cooks it. In the Scottish tale, the snake is white, has been cut into three pieces, and the middle piece is given to the old woman. Furthermore, in this tale, Scott, who had seen the old woman dip her finger into the sauce, waited until she had left the house, dipped his finger into the sauce, and applied it to his tongue. Immediately the cock crew, and Scott received the gift of foresight. In the Breton version, the workman, waiting until the old woman had gone from the house, tasted the snake and immediately understood the language of birds. The principal points of difference in these two stories lie in the facts that, in the one, a person attains supernatural wisdom through dipping his finger into the sauce of a cooking snake and inserting the finger in his mouth, while in the other, the hero purposely tastes the cooked snake and gains an understanding of bird-speech. A significant feature in the story of Michael Scott is the crowing of a cock, which, inasmuch as it serves no purpose

[38] Cf. W. A. Jayne, *The Healing Gods of Ancient Civilizations,* New Haven, 1925, pp. 258-9, 283-4.

in the story, prompts a question as to whether it may not be a remnant of a displaced *motif* of bird-speech. Curiously enough, the Continental tales of the Dr. Theophrastus type and the Scottish tales of the Fearachur Leigh type exhibit the same fundamental differences found in these two different stories of the old woman and the cooked snake.

Summed up, evidence bearing upon the interrelationships of the foregoing stories may be presented as follows: (1) Scottish tales of the Fearachur Leigh type and Continental stories of the Dr. Theophrastus type are sufficiently alike to establish a belief that they are only variants of the same tradition. (2) Tales of the Dr. Theophrastus type seem to be merely specialized versions of the group represented by the German "Die weisse Schlange." (3) Neither stories of the white snake nor beliefs that eating a snake results in understanding of bird-speech are found in Irish lore, and, except for tales like those cited above, they are entirely lacking in Scottish or Welsh versions, whence it seems safe to assume that the tradition of the white snake was a Continental, perhaps Teutonic, development, and was not present in the primitive lore of the insular Celts. (4) In Continental tales of the white snake, the tasting of the forbidden dish is a wilful act on the part of the servant; it does not come about accidentally through the insertion of a burned finger in the mouth, and it results in ability to understand the languages of birds or other animals. (5) In the Scottish stories cited above, the insertion of the finger in the mouth is a feature common to all; it always results in acquisition of wisdom, never in understanding of bird or animal

speech, and, except in the case of Michael Scott, is an act caused by the accidental burning of a finger or fingers. (6) The stories of Gilleadha and Michael Scott contain features which may possibly be remnants of a displaced *motif* of bird-speech.

When, in addition to the evidence presented above, one remembers that a tradition regarding the incitation of supernatural wisdom through the insertion of a finger or thumb in the mouth has been existent in Ireland since the ninth century, that the story concerning Finn's burning his thumb or finger on the salmon of knowledge is undoubtedly as old as the twelfth century, and that these tales and traditions have been widely distributed throughout Ireland and Scotland for centuries, one leans toward a conclusion that the stories of Fearachur Leigh, Sir James Ramsay, Gilleadha, and Michael Scott are Continental versions of the cycle of the white snake in which the servant's wilful tasting of the serpent and the resultant knowledge of bird-speech have been replaced by the Irish tradition of the finger of knowledge. If further evidence were needed in support of a conclusion that this episode of the burned finger in the foregoing Scottish tales is a direct borrowing from the Irish tradition, one might point toward an additional parallel in the stories of Finn and that of Fearachur Leigh. The many Scottish tales relate throughout that, whenever Finn wished to gain knowledge of the unknown, it was only necessary for him to put his finger or thumb under his knowledge tooth, and the thing he wished to know was revealed to him.[39] The statement in the story of Fearachur Leigh that

[39] See Chapter II, notes 42, 43, and text, *supra*.

Farquhar knew by the serpent's wisdom which was his "when he laid his finger under his teeth" is then very significant.[40]

Although there seems to be slight reason to doubt that the episodes of the burned finger as they appear in the stories of Fearachur Leigh, Sir James Ramsay, and Gilleadha are traceable to tales of Finn, an attempt to fix the source of the incident relating to the insertion of the finger in the mouth as it occurs in the story of Michael Scott requires further investigation. At the outset, it appears relatively certain that the story of Michael Scott and that of the Breton workman are variants of the same tale. The former of these stories contains an episode according to which Scott dips his finger into the snake broth and inserts the finger in his mouth, whereupon he understands the language of birds. The tale of the Breton workman has no allusion to a finger or thumb. That the story of Michael Scott is a version of the tale also related of the Breton workman, but combined with an incident concerning the touching of the broth with the finger and the insertion of the finger in the mouth, seems probable for a number of reasons: (1) both are legends of a white snake; (2) the story of the Breton workman, containing no allusion to a finger, is a true representative of the typical cycle of the white snake, a *motif* which includes the detail relating to the speech of the birds, but does not comprise matters regarding the use of the finger; (3) the story of Michael Scott is a Scottish tale, and as such would undoubtedly have been exposed to the influence of the tradition of the finger of know-

[40] See note 1, and text, *supra*.

ledge which appears in other Scottish stories. All in all, it seems highly probable that the incident relating to the insertion of the finger in the mouth included in the tale of Michael Scott is an episode, traceable to the Finn-saga, which has been incorporated in a variant of the legend of the white snake as related of the Breton workman.

There seems to be, however, a very remote possibility that the detail relating to the insertion of the finger in the mouth in the story of Michael Scott might be traceable to a non-Irish source; and episodes found in certain Continental tales contain features which might be looked upon as evidence in support of this possibility. Thus, an Esthonian story cited by Antti Aarne may be summarized as follows:[41]

> A man cutting wood in a forest comes across a snake, which he does not kill, and which, in gratitude, advises him to touch it with his finger and put the finger into his mouth. The snake declares that this will insure the man the ability to understand what is spoken, but also warns him that he will die if he tells what he knows. The man touches the snake with his finger and puts the finger into his mouth, thereafter knowing not only the speech of the grass but also that of the cock.

The remainder of the story is irrelevant to this investigation. A feature which likewise is somewhat suggestive of the finger-incident in the Scottish tales occurs in another Continental story, which relates that a boy dipped his finger into a vessel and, finding that the finger had become gilded, applied the liquid to his

[41] Antti Aarne, *Der tiersprachenkundige Mann und seine neugierige Frau* (*FF Communications*, 15 [1914]), pp. 22, 30.

hair, thus securing a head of golden hair.[42] Since the incidents in these stories bear some resemblance to those found in tales relating to Sigurd in Norse tradition and to the Hürnen Seyfrid of Germanic lore, they will be discussed in the following chapter.

[42] Antti Aarne, *Verzeichnis der Märchentypen* (*FF Communications,* I, iii [1911]), No. 314.

CHAPTER VI

THE NORSE SIGURD AND THE TRADITION OF THE THUMB OF KNOWLEDGE

BEFORE seeking to formulate an hypothesis regarding the origin of the tradition of the thumb of knowledge, it seems advisable to examine certain episodes found in tales concerning the Norse hero Sigurd.

The most important of these occurs in the *Fáfnismál*, a poem included in the collection known as the Elder or Poetic *Edda*.[1] This may be summarized as follows:[2]

Prose Introduction

Sigurd and Regin went up to Gnitaheith and there found Fáfnir's track, on which he crawled to water. Then Sigurd made a great trench

[1] For a full discussion concerning the manuscripts, editions, translations, and problems connected with the *Edda*, see B. Sijmons and H. Gering, *Die Lieder der Edda*, Halle A.S., I, ii (1906), Introduction. The Icelandic Bishop Brynjulf Sveinsson gave the name of *Edda* to a thirteenth-century manuscript which he discovered in 1643, but erroneously ascribed the collection to the Icelandic scholar Saemund Sigfusson, who lived in the twelfth century. The *Eddic* lays, composed approximately between 850 and 1050, were not committed to writing before they reached Iceland, but they originated for the most part in Norway, in part also in Greenland and Iceland.

There is, however, some question regarding the place of origin. Concerning this and other points relating to the Poetic *Edda*, see Sijmons and Gering, *op. cit.*, pp. CCLXXVIII ff.; Sophus Bugge, *The Home of the Eddic Poems*, tr. W. H. Schofield, London, 1899, pp. xiv ff.; Francis E. Sandbach, *The Nibelungenlied and Gudrun in England and America*, 1904, p. 19; *Völsunga Saga*, tr. Magnússon and Morris, Camelot Series, 1888, pp. 267 ff.; Henry Adams Bellows, *The Poetic Edda*, 1923, General Introduction; Bertha S. Phillpotts, *The Elder Edda and Ancient Scandinavian Drama*, Cambridge, 1920, pp. 47 ff., and notes.

[2] In this summary of the *Fáfnismál*, based on Bellows, *op. cit.*, pp. 370 ff., the prose passages are rendered literally, but the portions in verse are, for the most part, greatly condensed.

across the path and took his place therein. When Fáfnir crawled from the gold, he blew out venom, and it fell from above on Sigurd's head. But when Fáfnir crawled over the trench, then Sigurd thrust his sword into his heart. Fáfnir writhed and struck out with his head and tail. Sigurd leaped from the trench, and each looked at the other. Fáfnir said:[3]

Stanza 1

"Whose son art thou, and of whom art thou born?" etc.

Prose

Sigurd concealed his name because it was believed in olden times that the word of a dying man might have great power if he cursed his foe by name. He said:

Stanzas 2-22

Sigurd at first made an evasive reply but soon admitted that he was Sigurd, son of Sigmund. He then exchanged a number of questions and answers with Fáfnir on divers subjects, Fáfnir finally warning him against the bane of the gold and the wiles of Regin. [Thereupon Fáfnir died.][4]

[3] The passage in the *Völsungasaga* which corresponds to this prose introduction to the *Fáfnismál* is found in Section 18 of that work. See *The Volsunga Saga,* tr. Magnusson and Morris, Viking Edition, Norroena Soc., 1906, Secs. 18, 19. For the Icelandic text, see the edition by W. Ranisch founded on Bugge's text, *Die Völsungasaga,* 1891, Kaps. 18, 19. Cf. Sijmons and Gering, *op. cit.,* pp. 319 ff., notes.

The passage in the *Völsungasaga* corresponding to this introduction presents a version which is considerably elaborated and which contains a number of details not found either in the *Fáfnismál* or in the *Snorra Edda,* e.g., the height of the cliff, the dialogue between Sigurd and Regin concerning the digging of the trench or pit, the appearance of, and the advice given by, the old man, and an allusion to Sigurd's arm covered with blood. In essential details, however, the versions are in strict accord.

[4] The statement (in brackets) concerning Fáfnir's death is taken from the *Völsungasaga.*

Prose

Regin had gone away while Sigurd fought Fáfnir, and came back afterward while Sigurd was wiping the blood from his sword. Regin said:

Stanzas 23-30

Regin asserts that in his opinion Sigurd is the bravest of men but declares that he himself is in some measure responsible for the victory. Sigurd reminds Regin that he (Regin) had remained hidden in the heather during the conflict, and in answer to Regin's claim of credit for the forging of the sword, he replies that a stout heart is better than a mighty blade.

Prose

Then Regin went up to Fáfnir and cut the heart out of him with a sword, that was named Rithil, and then he drank blood from the wound. Regin said:

31. "Sit thou [now], Sigurd, for I will sleep,
Hold Fáfnir's heart to the fire;
For I shall have the heart to eat,
After this draught of blood."

Sigurd took Fáfnir's heart and roasted it on a spit. When he thought that it was fully roasted, and the blood foamed out of the heart, then he tried it with his finger to see whether it was fully roasted. He burned his finger and put it in his mouth. But when Fáfnir's heart's blood came on his tongue, he understood the speech of birds. He heard nut-hatches chattering in the thickets. A nut-hatch said:[5]

[5] A comparison of the texts of the *Fáfnismál*, the *Völsungasaga*, and the *Snorra Edda* immediately reveals the close relationship of the corresponding passages. See Sijmons and Gering, *op. cit.*, pp. 328 ff.; *Die Völsungasaga*, ed. Ranisch, p. 32; and Finnur Jónsson, *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* (*Islendinga Sögur*, 41 [1907]), p. 178. The text of the *Fáfnismál* for Strophes 31-33 and for the prose preceding and following.

32. "There sits Sigurd, blood besprinkled,
Fáfnir's heart with fire he roasts;
Wise, methinks, were the breaker of rings,
To eat the life muscles all so bright."[6]

A second spake:[7]

33. "There Regin lies, and plans he lays
To betray the youth who trusts in him;
Lying words with wiles will he speak,
The smith of bale will avenge his brother."

Strophe 31, runs thus (Sijmons and Gering, *op. cit.*, pp. 328-330):

"Þá gekk Reginn at Fáfni ok skar hjarta ór honum meþ sverþi er Riþill heitir, ok þá drakk hann blóþ ór undinni eptir. Reginn kvaþ:

31. 'Sit þú [nú], Sigvǫrþr—[en] ek mon sofa ganga—,
ok halt Fáfnes hjarta viþ funa;
eiskǫld ek vil eten láta
ept þenna dreyra drykk.'

"Sigurþr tók Fáfnis hjarta ok steikþi á teini. Er hann hugþi at fullsteikt væri, ok freyddi sveitinn ór hjartanu, þá tók hann á fingri sínum ok skynjaþi hvárt fullsteikt væri. Hann brann ok brá fingrinum í munn sér. En er hjartblóþ Fáfnis kom á tungu honum, ok skilþi hann fugls rǫdd. Hann heyrþi at igþur klǫkuþu á hrísinu. Igþan kvaþ:

32. 'Þar sitr Sigvǫrþr sveita stokkenn,
Fáfnes hjarta viþ funa steiker;
spakr þǿtte mér spiller bauga,
ef fjǫrsega fránan æte.'
(Qnnur kvaþ:)

33. 'Þar liggr Regenn, ræþr umb viþ sik,
vill tæla mǫg þanns truer hǫnom;
berr af reiþe rǫng orþ saman,
vill bǫlvasmiþr bróþor hefna.'"

[6] Concerning the source of these bird-speech strophes, see Sijmons and Gering, *op. cit.*, p. 329, note.

[7] It should be noted that the words "A second spake," "A third spake," etc., do not appear in the manuscript. Apparently, the birds' stanzas come from more than one source. Regarding this matter, as well as that relating to the number of birds engaged in speaking, see Bellows, *op. cit.*, pp. 380-1, note.

Stanzas 34-39

Five more birds, each in turn, speak strophes. The third bird advises Sigurd to kill Regin and take the gold which Fáfnir guarded. The others reiterate this advice and comment on the wisdom thereof. Sigurd thereupon announces that he will kill Regin.

Prose

Sigurd hewed off Regin's head, and then he ate Fáfnir's heart and drank the blood of both Regin and Fáfnir. Then Sigurd heard what the nut-hatch said:

Stanzas 40-41

The bird advises Sigurd to bind the golden rings together and suggests that there is a maid, none so fair, whom he might possibly win. The bird further comments on the greenness of the paths which lead to Gjuki and suggests that the doughty king there has a daughter whom Sigurd might buy.

Stanzas 42-44

This same bird—or, as Bellows suggests, another one—then speaks to Sigurd, telling him of the hall on Hindarfjall, ringed about with flame, and of the battle-maid who, flame-encircled, sleeps upon the mountain.[8]

[8] Except for the statement concerning Brynhild and Hindarfjall incorporated in the speech of the fourth bird in the *Völsungasaga* (ed. Ranisch, p. 32), there is nothing in either the *Völsungasaga* or the *Snorra Edda* which corresponds to Stanzas 40-44 of the *Fáfnismál*. Concerning these stanzas, Bellows (*op. cit.*, p. 383, note), after observing that neither the manuscript nor any of the editions suggests the existence of more than one bird in Stanzas 40-44, makes the following statement: "It seems to me, however, that there are not only two birds, but two distinct stories. Stanzas 40-41 apply solely to Guthrun, and suggest that Sigurth will go straight to Gunnar's hall. Stanzas 42-44, on the other hand, apply solely to Brynhild, and indicate that Sigurth will find her before he visits the Gjukungs . . . In the present passage it is possible

> Sigurd rode along Fáfnir's trail to his lair and found it open. The doors were of iron, and the door-posts. Of iron, too, were all the beams in the house, which was dug down into the earth. There Sigurd found a mighty store of gold, and he filled two chests full thereof; he took the fear-helm and the golden byrnie and the sword Hrotti and many other precious things, and loaded Grani with them, but the horse would not go forward until Sigurd mounted on his back.

An examination of those sections of the *Völsunga-saga* and the *Snorra Edda* which record the episodes preserved in the *Fáfnismál* and the *Reginsmál* at once reveals two facts:[9] (1) the passage in the *Völsunga-saga* is a prose narrative which, except in a few minor details, follows the tale both as to prose and verse exactly as it is preserved in the *Fáfnismál*; (2) the passage in the *Snorra Edda* is a prose narrative which, save for some matters of small importance, repeats the story precisely as it is found in the prose passages of the *Fáfnismál.* Concerning the episode of Sigurd's burned finger and the speaking birds as it appears in the *Snorra Edda,* Sijmons writes as follows:[10]

that two birds are speaking, each reflecting one version of the story; it seems even more likely that one speech or the other (40-41 or 42-44) reflects the original form of the narrative, the other having been added, either later or from another poem."

[9] The *Völsungasaga* is a prose work which originated in Norway, probably about the middle of the thirteenth century, and is preserved in a number of manuscripts, the oldest being an Icelandic parchment which apparently dates from about the end of the fourteenth century. The work is for the most part merely a prose reorganization of the *Eddic* lays, of which the author knew a greater number than we possess today. For information concerning manuscripts, translations, datings, ori-

"The prose in the *Reginsmál* preceding strophe 15 is clearly traceable in the further narrative, as are the prose introduction to the *Fáfnismál,* the prose before and after strophe 31 of this poem (the two following strophes, 32, 33, being quoted by the redactor), and the concluding prose passage, which in R [Codex Regius] is immediately followed by the prose introduction to the *Sigrdrífumál.*"

Concerning that part of the *Völsungasaga* which contains the episode pertaining to Sigurd's burned finger and the talking birds, Sijmons writes:[15]

"And the whole first part of Chapter 18—Sigurd and Regin on Gnitaheith—reveals the use of another source in addition to the prose introduction to the *Fáfnismál,* the real paraphrase of which begins with the words, 'Ok er Fáfnir fekk banasár, spurði hann.' "[16]

gin, and organization of the work, see Sijmons and Gering, *op. cit.,* pp. XVIII ff., LV ff.; Otto L. Jiriczek, *Die deutsche Heldensage,* 4th ed., Sammlung Göschen, Berlin, 1916, pp. 53 ff.; *The Volsunga Saga,* tr. Magnusson and Morris, Viking Edition, 1906, p. 25; F. E. Sandbach, *op. cit.,* p. 19; *Altdeutsche und altnordische Helden-Sagen,* tr. Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen, 3d ed., 1872, pp. VII ff., XIV ff.

The Prose or *Snorra Edda* is a prose work composed, in all probability, during the first half of the thirteenth century by the Icelander Snorri Sturluson, the oldest manuscript in which it is preserved dating from about 1300. The close similarity between certain stories preserved in Snorri's work and in the Poetic *Edda,* together with the fact that some strophes in the Prose *Edda* are preserved *verbatim* in the older collection, indicates the close relationship between the two works. For a full discussion of this connexion, together with information concerning manuscripts, dates, etc., see Sijmons and Gering, *op. cit.,* pp. XIII ff., XXVII ff., XXX-XXXI, XXXVI ff., LIII, and table of contents. Cf. Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, *The Prose Edda,* New York, 1916, *Introduction;* Otto L. Jiriczek, *op. cit.,* p. 53; Eiríkr Magnússon, *Edda, Its Derivation and Meaning,* 1896, p. 17; Morris and Magnússon, *The Saga Library,* London, VI (1905), xvi ff., lxv ff., lxxxvi ff.

[16] Sijmons and Gering, *op. cit.,* p. LIII.

Even if it should appear that the *Fáfnismál,* as preserved in the Poetic *Edda,* were not the immediate source of this part of the accounts in the *Völsungasaga* and the *Snorra Edda,*[12] it would seem safe to assume that the episodes recorded in the prose passages of the *Fáfnismál* and the counterparts of these preserved in the other two versions may be traced to a common source. The episode of the burned finger is identical in all essential details in the three versions

[11] *Ibid.,* p. LXVII.

[12] Regarding the sources of the *Völsungasaga,* see Sijmons and Gering, *op. cit.,* p. LXVIII.

[13] It may be noted that the three versions differ somewhat in details. In the *Fáfnismál* it is Regin (prose before Stanza 31), in the *Völsungasaga,* Sigurd, who cuts out Fáfnir's heart. The Snorri version makes no allusion to this detail. In the first set of bird-speeches, Stanzas 32-38, of the *Fáfnismál,* seven (?) birds are represented as having spoken. The *Völsungasaga* shows but six. In the *Snorra Edda,* only two birds and two bird-speeches appear, but these are the identical strophes attributed to the first two birds in the *Fáfnismál* (Stanzas 32-33). It should further be observed that an allusion to Brynhild and Hindarfjall appears in the speech of the fourth bird in the *Völsungasaga,* whereas the fourth bird's speech in the *Fáfnismál* (Stanza 35) does not contain this reference. According to the *Fáfnismál* (prose after Stanza 39, and Stanzas 40-44), Sigurd hewed off Regin's head, ate Fáfnir's heart, and drank the blood of both Regin and Fáfnir. He then heard a bird, or possibly two birds, advising him to go to Gjuki, and telling him of the Hindarfjall and the flame-ringed battle-maid. The *Völsungasaga* records nothing of all this except the statement concerning Brynhild and Hindarfjall (the speech of the fourth bird) and the statements that Sigurd hewed off Regin's head and ate of Fáfnir's heart. The Snorri account contains only the statement that Sigurd went over to Regin and slew him.

Although a question might arise as to whether the sources of the *Völsungasaga* and *Snorra Edda* accounts were in exact accord with the version preserved in the Codex Regius, it is relatively certain that the story through the speeches of the first two birds, which is in agreement in the three documents, represents the general form of the tale in which the three versions of the story found root.

and probably represents the tradition as it existed in the common source, whatever that may have been.

Other tales concerning the hero Sigurd which likewise have a bearing upon the question of the tradition of the thumb of knowledge demand attention at this point. Of these, the *Thidrekssaga* preserves the episode in a form very similar to that found in the Norse versions.[14] That part of the *Thidrekssaga* which is relevant to this investigation may be summarized thus:[15]

> The illustrious smith Mime had a wicked brother Regin, who had been changed into a fierce dragon because of witchcraft and magic. One day, while Mime was burning charcoal in a wood, a naked infant boy came to him; and when Mime, clothing him, took him on his knee, a hind came and licked the boy's face and head.[16]

[14] The *Thidrekssaga* is a detailed prose narrative composed in Norway about 1250, based on songs and tales by Low Germans. For information concerning texts, manuscripts, etc., see Otto L. Jiriczek, *op. cit.*, pp. 69, 72, and 138; C. R. Unger, *Saga Didriks Konungs af Bern*, 1853, pp. XI ff. For translation, see *Die Geschichte Thidreks von Bern*, tr. by Dine Erichsen (Thule: *Altnordische Dichtung und Prosa*, Jena, XXII [1924]); cf. Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen, *Altdeutsche und altnordische Helden-Sagen*, 3d ed., I (1872). See also F. E. Sandbach, *The Nibelungenlied and Gudrun in England and America*, 1904, p. 17; Jessie L. Weston, "Legend of the Wagner Trilogy," a supplement to *The Volsunga Saga*, ed. Magnusson and Morris, Viking Edition, 1906, pp. 167 ff.

[15] This summary is made from the translation by Erichsen, Thule ed., pp. 217-220; cf. von der Hagen, *op. cit.*, Kaps. 163-6, pp. 339 ff. For the text, see Unger, *op. cit.*, Caps. 163-166, pp. 165 ff.

[16] For the story of Sigurd's birth, as related in the *Thidrekssaga*, see Unger, *op. cit.*, Caps. 152-162; Erichsen, *Altnordische Dichtung und Prosa*, Thule ed., XXII (1924), 210-217; von der Hagen, *op. cit.*, pp. 321 ff.

Although one immediately thinks of the story of Romulus and Remus and of Rustam's father, Zal, in connexion with tales relating to the rearing of children by animals, certain details in this story of Sigurd are strikingly similar to incidents preserved in legends belonging to the Finn-saga. The name *Oisin* (*Ossín*), literally translated, means "little deer," and, ac-

Mime therefore knew that the hind must have suckled the boy. Mime took the child to rear as his son and called him Sigurd. When he was nine years old, the boy was so large and strong that no one had seen his equal, but he was also very unruly, so that Mime set him to work in the smithy. Here he not only maltreated Mime's helpers but with his first blow destroyed the hammer and anvil that he was using. Mime then notified his brother Regin, the dragon, that he was sending a boy to be killed, and, having supplied Sigurd with food and drink sufficient for nine days, bade him go to the forest to burn charcoal. Sigurd cut down a large tree, and, making a fire, consumed his entire supply of food and wine. Soon the dragon came, and Sigurd, seizing the tree trunk from the fire, killed him, after which he took his axe and cut off the dragon's head. As he wondered where he should obtain food, an idea came to him, and, taking his kettle, he filled it with water, and hung it over the fire. Then with his axe he cut from the dragon great pieces of flesh,

cording to an ancient tale, Oisin's mother, Blai Derg, existed in the form of a hind. See Chapter IV, notes 9 and 47, *supra*. Furthermore, certain stories preserved in oral tradition relate that Oisin's deer-mother *licked his temple*, and deer-hair immediately grew thereupon. See *Leabhar na Feinne*, ed. J. F. Campbell, I (1872), 198 ff.

Although these similar details in Irish and Germanic stories may have been independent developments from a widespread idea that children have been reared by animals, the fact that other features of this tale concerning Sigurd, which will be discussed later, are probably of Irish origin, raises a question as to whether this detail may not likewise be traced to an Irish source. In connexion with these Irish features, see also L. C. Stern, *Zeitschr. f. vergleichende Litteraturgeschichte*, VIII (1895), 78 ff.; G. Dottin, *Contes irlandais*, 1901, p. 189; S. H. O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica*, II (1892), 522; J. G. Campbell and A. Nutt, *The Fians* (*Waifs and Strays of Celtic Tradition, Argyllshire Series*, London, IV [1891]), pp. 78 ff.; A. Nutt, *Folk-Lore*, IV (1893), 377; *Leabhar na Feinne*, ed. J. F. Campbell, I (1872), 152.

which he placed in the kettle until he had enough to eat. When Sigurd thought that the pieces were cooked, he dipped his hand into the kettle and, in so doing, burned himself. He thereupon thrust his finger into his mouth to cool it, but as soon as the broth came upon his tongue and into his throat, he heard two birds gossiping together, and understood what one of them said.[17] It declared that it would be better if this man could know what they knew; that it would be better if Sigurd killed Mime, since Mime had sent Sigurd there to be killed; that the dragon was Mime's brother; and that Mime would revenge the dragon's death and kill Sigurd. Sigurd then took the blood of the dragon and besmeared himself "and his hands" therewith, and it so happened that wherever the blood touched him, it became as if it were horn. Then he took off his clothing and besmeared his whole body except between the two shoulders, a spot which he could not reach, whereupon he put on his clothing and went home carrying the head of the dragon in his hand.

Closely related to this section of the (originally) Low German *Thidrekssaga* is the Upper German *Seyfriedslied.* Although this poem contains no episode in which a burned finger is inserted in the mouth, nor any suggestion of the prophetic bird, it includes one incident which merits investigation. The *Seyfriedslied,* in its present form, consists of a fusion of two lays, partly contradictory. Only the first of these is relevant to the problem under consideration, and its story, briefly stated, is as follows:[18]

[17] For the text of the passage relating to the burned finger, the speaking birds, and the smearing of his body with the dragon's blood, see Unger, *op. cit.,* p. 168.

[18] The *Seyfriedslied* is preserved only in printed editions belonging to the sixteenth century but is based upon old bal-

Sigmund, a mighty king who dwelt in the Netherlands, had a son, Siegfried, but because the boy was wild and unruly, his father sent him away. Siegfried came to a smith's home, and there engaged himself as an apprentice, but, since he was always in mischief, the smith, in the hope that the boy would be destroyed, sent him to a linden-tree near which a fierce dragon lived. Siegfried slew not only this dragon but many other monsters, and, piling them in a heap, burned them. As the horn melted in the hides of the monsters, a little brook of melted horn flowed from the burning mass. Siegfried stuck his finger into this brook, and, as the finger cooled, found that it was covered with horn, whereupon, with the melted horn from the brook, he smeared his whole body except a spot between his shoulders, which spot later caused his death. Siegfried found the hoard of the dwarf Nybling and then went to the court of King Gibich, where he entered service as a suitor for the ruler's daughter.

In addition to the written documents cited above, certain wood and stone carvings found in various Scandinavian districts, as well as on the Isle of Man, have a definite bearing upon problems connected with the Sigurd-saga. Of these, perhaps, the most widely known are those found on the carved doorposts, now in the Christiania Museum, from the church of Hyllestad in Sätersdal. These Hyllestad carvings, which in all probability date from about 1200, depict a number of episodes from the story of Sigurd, viz., Regin's

lads, probably of the thirteenth century. See Jiriczek, *Die deutsche Heldensage,* 4th ed., Sammlung Göschen, Berlin, 1916, pp. 69, 71, and for the text, as well as for other data, see *Das Lied vom Hürnen Seyfrid,* ed. Wolfgang Golther, 1889, from which this summary is made.

forging the sword for Sigurd, Sigurd's slaying of Fáfnir, Sigurd's proving of the sword, his killing of Regin, etc.; and one of the episodes shown on these doorposts is clearly that of the burned finger and the talking birds. In this illustration Sigurd is shown sitting under a tree roasting Fáfnir's heart over a fire; his left thumb is in his mouth; with his right hand he holds the spit; on the other side of the fire is Regin, who appears to be asleep; and above them in the branches of the tree are three birds.[19] A church door at Vigusdal, Robygdelag, which probably dates from the beginning of the thirteenth century, shows similar carvings.[20] Of greater significance to this investigation, however, are the pictures which appear on certain well-known rune-stones. The Ramsundsberg stone of Jöder parish, West Södermanland, clearly shows, together with runic inscriptions, carvings which represent Sigurd's killing the dragon; the tongs, hammer, and bellows belonging to Regin; the otter of the Andvari waterfall; the headless Regin; the laden Grani; the two birds in the tree; and Sigurd, sitting before the fire roasting the heart of Fáfnir. As in the Hyllestad carving, Sigurd is shown holding the spit in his right hand, while his left thumb is inserted in his mouth.[21]

[19] For reproductions of these carvings, general information concerning them, probable dates, etc., see Henrik Schück and Karl Warburg, *Illustrerad Svensk Litteraturhistoria,* Stockholm, I (1896), 40 ff. See also P. M. C. Kermode, *Manx Crosses,* 1907, pp. 173-175; Axel Olrik, *Nordisches Geistesleben,* tr. by Wilhelm Ranisch, Heidelberg, 1908, pp. 56 ff.; Otto L. Jiriczek, *op. cit.,* pp. 119-121.

[20] See Kermode, *op. cit.,* p. 173.

[21] For an illustration of the face of this stone and data concerning it, see Schück and Warburg, *op. cit.,* pp. 43, 46; P. B. Du Chaillu, *The Viking Age,* New York, I (1889), 187; Kermode, *op. cit.,* p. 172; Oscar Montelius, *The Civilization of*

This stone, according to Stephens, as well as the Gök stone, which will be discussed later, is early Christian, dating from the "beginning of the eleventh age," and was so carved because the deceased claimed descent from Sigurd.[22]

The Gök stone, of Härad parish, West Södermanland, likewise bears carvings which represent episodes in the Sigurd-saga.[23] These are similar in many respects to those of the Ramsundsberg stone and show Sigurd slaying the dragon, a carving practically identical with that on the Ramsundsberg stone; the headless Regin; the otter; the steed Grani, tied to what is probably meant for a tree, on which there are no birds; a single bird; Regin's hammer; and an object, found also on the Ramsundsberg stone, which apparently represents a bellows. The general likeness in the carvings on the two stones indicates a close relationship between them, but certain differences between them should be noted. On the Ramsundsberg stone, as indicated above, Sigurd is shown in a sitting posture, his

Sweden in Heathen Times, tr. F. H. Woods, London, 1888, pp. 201 ff. (cf. the German translation by Carl Appel, *Die Kultur Schwedens in vorchristlicher Zeit,* Berlin, 1885, pp. 187 ff.); Prof. Carl Säve, *Zur Nibelungensage, Siegfriedbilder,* tr. J. Mestorf, Hamburg, 1870, pp. 1-88, and Plates I-III. Montelius cites as his source of these illustrations, Professor C(arl) Säve, *Abhandlungen der Vitterh. Hist. o Ant. Akademie,* Teil 26. See also Otto L. Jiriczek, *Northern Hero Legends,* tr. M. Bentinck Smith, London, 1902, p. 60; Mary Wilhelmine Williams, *Social Scandinavia in the Viking Age,* New York, 1920, pp. 192-3.

[22] *Studies on Northern Mythology,* London, 1883, pp. 372-3. Cf. Kermode, *op. cit.,* p. 173.

[23] See Schück and Warburg, *op. cit.,* pp. 44, 46; Kermode, *op. cit.,* p. 172; Montelius, *op. cit.,* p. 202; Sophus Bugge, *Studien über die Entstehung der nordischen Götter- und Heldensagen,* tr. Oscar Brenner, München, 1889, p. 535, note 1.

left thumb in his mouth, and his right hand holding what is apparently a stick with a pear-shaped object, presumably a heart, at the end of it. The Gök stone likewise represents Sigurd in a sitting posture, his right hand grasping what seems to be a stick at the end of which is the same pear-shaped object as that depicted on the Ramsundsberg stone. In fact, except that the Ramsundsberg stone shows a fire under the heart, the carvings are practically identical so far as the right arm, hand, and contents of the hand are concerned. The Gök stone shows Sigurd's left hand not with his thumb in his mouth, but as extending outward and upward from his body and grasping a hammer. On the Ramsundsberg stone, two birds sit on the branches of the tree, but the tree on the Gök stone has no birds, though a single one appears separately elsewhere on the stone.

Points of similarity in the carvings on these two stones raise a question concerning their relationship. Both were discovered, only a few miles apart, in West Södermanland. From the similarity of subjects, as well as the general parallelism in treatment, one is tempted to conjecture that one of the artists had seen the work of the other, or that the works of both artists, in their fundamental aspects, were imitations of the same original, possibly several times removed. Kermode asserts that the Gök stone is the smaller of the two stones and declares that it seems to have been suggested by the Ramsundsberg stone.[24] It is relatively certain that the carvings on the two stones are not the work of one artist; those on the Ramsundsberg stone show consid-

[24] *Manx Crosses*, 1907, p. 172.

erable artistic ability; those on the Gök stone are crude and uncouth. If, however, it be assumed that the carvings on the latter are the crude efforts of an ambitious tyro to copy some work similar to that preserved on the Ramsundsberg stone, it becomes necessary to explain why this alleged imitator did not try to picture Sigurd's thumb in his mouth or the birds on the tree. Granting the possibility that the artist of the Gök stone may have been following a carving similar to that found on the Ramsundsberg stone showing a thumb in the mouth, two birds on the tree, etc., and that on his own initiative he not only placed a hammer in Sigurd's left hand, but modified other details, one sees also the possibility that the pictures on the two stones illustrate different versions of the Sigurd story, the Gök stone giving episodes from an older form which had only one bird and did not contain the episode of the burned finger.[25] Three stones which likewise bear carvings of Sigurd and his thumb have been discovered in the Isle of Man. One side of a slab of a cross from Jurby (Kermode, *op. cit.*, Plate XLIII) shows Sigurd, apparently in a mound rather than in a pit, thrusting a sword into the dragon; and below this, a figure, again obviously Sigurd, in long coat and conical cap, holds in his right hand a wand on which, almost obliterated, is what

[25] See Bellows's statement, note 7, *supra*, concerning the birds and bird-speeches. It may also be noted at this point that none of the versions of the Sigurd story cited above contains any statement that Sigurd burned his thumb or put his thumb into his mouth. In each case a finger is definitely specified. Yet the carvings on the doorposts of Hyllestad and the Ramsundsberg stone clearly show Sigurd with his thumb in his mouth. These facts attain some significance when one remembers that several of the very ancient Irish tales definitely state that Finn put his thumb into his mouth, etc.

was probably meant to be the dragon's heart, while the left hand is held near the face, in what is seemingly an attempt to depict the left thumb as in the mouth. Beneath the standing figure, Grani is shown, and immediately below the horse is something which must be meant to represent a tree, since the figure of a bird is seen on the under side of it.

On one face of a slab of a cross from Malew (Kermode, *op. cit.*, Plate XLIV), the figure of Sigurd is much the same as that depicted on the Jurby stone, though here his sword hangs at his side. In his right hand he holds a wand on which the dragon's heart can be seen roasting over the fire, the flames being represented by three pointed pieces. His left thumb is in his mouth; and beneath the standing figure, Sigurd is shown thrusting his sword into the dragon, as on the Jurby stone. The illustrations of the thumb in the mouth and the roasting of the dragon's heart are clear and unmistakable on this stone. The Andreas slab (Kermode, *op. cit.*, Plate XLV) shows Sigurd roasting the heart over the flames, his right hand held near his mouth, probably an attempt to depict the thumb in the mouth. Immediately behind him is pictured a carving of a bird's head, and the slaying of the dragon and Grani's head are also shown. The slab at Maughold, though depicting other episodes in the Sigurd-legend, is not relevant in the present connexion, and the same statement holds true of certain other stones in Scandinavia and England.[36]

[36] For illustrations of the faces of these stones and data concerning them, see Kermode, *op. cit.*, pp. 170 ff. Cf. Alexander Bugge, *Die Wikinger*, tr. Heinz Hungerland, Halle A.S., 1906, pp. 169 ff.; Schück and Warburg, *op. cit.*, pp. 45 ff.; S.

According to Kermode, these stones, as well as the Swedish stones cited above, may have been raised to individuals who claimed descent from Sigurd, and he further states that the Sigurd-carvings in Sweden have been placed, as far as period is concerned, between the beginning and the middle of the eleventh century. The Norwegian wood-carvings appear to be later, and one has been dated as late as the middle of the twelfth century. The stones from the Isle of Man he assigns to a period between 1075 and 1153.[27]

A review of the evidence presented in this chapter at once suggests certain probable conclusions. First, as indicated above, it is relatively certain that the episodes of the burned finger and the talking birds as preserved in the *Fáfnismál,* the *Völsungasaga,* and the *Snorra Edda* have their origins in a common source. Since the three versions are almost identical through the speeches of the first two birds, those parts of the three versions which are in agreement evidently reflect the tale as it existed in the common source. It also seems certain that the carvings on the Scandinavian and Manx stones, as well as the wood-carvings noted above, are illustrations of the same tale and indicate a knowledge of the story as it existed either in its original

Bugge, *Studien über die Entstehung der nordischen Götter- und Heldensagen,* tr. Brenner, München, 1889, pp. 533 ff.; Axel Olrik, *Nordisches Geistesleben,* tr. Ranisch, Heidelberg, 1908, pp. 53 ff.; P. B. Du Chaillu, *The Viking Age,* New York, I (1889), 187, and II (1889), 244, 248, 267; H. C. March, *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society,* IX (1891), 49 ff., 88 ff.; Carl Säve, *Zur Nibelungensage, Siegfriedbilder,* tr. J. Mestorf, Hamburg, 1870, pp. 1-88, and Plates I-III; P. M. C. Kermode, *Catalogue of the Manks Crosses,* 2d ed., London, 1892, pp. 6, 15-17, 27, 35-53.

[27] Kermode, *Manx Crosses,* London, 1907, p. 180.

form or in one of its later developments. Finally, it is quite clear, if Kermode's dating of the Manx stones is correct, that the tale of Sigurd's burned finger and his consequent understanding of bird-speech was existent in Norse tradition as early as the eleventh century.

The source of this tradition of Sigurd's burned finger and the talking birds is, however, the point in question. In a series of articles which appeared almost forty years ago, Heinrich Zimmer attempted to show, through argument based on philological and historical grounds, that the Irish Finn-saga was created between the ninth and eleventh centuries, and, as Vendryes has phrased it, "reflects the exploits of the pirate Scandinavians." Zimmer's conclusions, at the outset, received little credence from Celtic scholars, and, when it was pointed out that traditions concerning Finn and the *fiana* were existent in Ireland in pre-viking days, they became generally discredited. Since conclusions reached by Zimmer concerning the matter of Sigurd's burned finger coincide with opinions expressed in more recent publications, the validity of his views becomes a subject belonging to the subsequent general discussion, and may be passed over at this point.[28]

[28] For Zimmer's conclusions and the opinions of other scholars concerning his views, see Zimmer, *ZfdA*, XXXII (1888), 196 ff.; XXXIII (1889), 129 ff.; XXXV (1891), 1 ff., 252 ff.; *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen*, March 1, 1887, pp. 169 ff., 184 ff.; J. Strachan, *Phil. Soc. Trans.*, 1891-4, pp. 555 ff., and notes; Nutt, *Academy*, XXXIX (1891), 162, 235; Meyer, *Academy*, XXXIX (1891), 283; *RC*, X (1889), 360 ff.; Stokes, *RC*, IX (1888), 97 ff.; *Academy*, XXXIX (1891), 210; Nutt, *Folk-Lore*, III (1892), 397 ff.; *Folk-Lore*, XXI (1910), 398; D'Arbois, *RC*, XII (1891), 295 ff., 405 ff.; Duvau, *RC*, XIII (1892), 291, 294-5; J. G. Campbell and A. Nutt, *The Fians*, London, 1891, pp. xxii ff.; Loth, *RC*, XIII (1892), 506 ff.; Meyer, *Fianaigecht*, pp. i ff., xviii, and note; Vendryes, *RC*, XXXII (1911), 106 ff.; Eoin MacNeill, *Duanaire Finn*, I (*ITS*, VII), London, 1908, pp. xxiv ff.

Foregoing chapters have shown that the tradition concerning Finn's thumb (or finger) of knowledge is preserved in a text which may be as old as the eighth century; and we have also seen that the early stories and statements concerning Finn's wisdom-giving thumb or finger prove that this tradition in connexion with him had attained a considerable circulation in Ireland as early as the ninth century. Even if one could prove that the Irish texts containing this tale did not exist in pre-viking times, it should be borne in mind that, despite the speculative eleventh-century dates for Swedish and Manx rune-stones, there is no evidence to indicate that the episode of the burned finger formed part of the story of Sigurd before the beginning of the twelfth century, or at least two centuries subsequent to its appearance in Irish texts. The question concerning the origin of the tradition of the finger of knowledge and its appearance in Norse and Irish tales is reserved, however, for later discussion.

In studies which have appeared since the publication of Zimmer's views, a number of scholars have attempted to ascertain the source of the episode relating to Sigurd's burned finger and the speaking birds, and have reached very different conclusions. The opinions of R. C. Boer may briefly be summarized as follows:[29]

> The episode of the burned finger and the speaking birds is based on the primitive idea that magic powers could be attained by eating a magic adversary, and originally the speaking birds did not form part of this *motif*, as is shown by the first admonition of the bird, which advises Sigurd to eat the heart. If he has al-

[29] *Zeitschr. f. d. Philologie*, XXXVII (1905), 479 ff.

ready eaten the heart, this advice is unnecessary; if he has not, how can he understand the speech of the bird? The prose makes it clear that Sigurd burned his finger on the roasting heart, put his finger into his mouth, and understood what the birds said; but all this is only an idle repetition of the same *motif*.

The matter becomes simple if we ignore the prose, which gives only the idea of the redactor and is not authoritative. According to the poem, the birds spoke in the language of men and advised Sigurd to eat the heart that he might attain the dragon's strength.

The redactor did not understand the idea of the poet, but, though he introduced a *motif* at variance with the verse, he did not invent the *motif*. The introduction of the *Seyfriedslied* proves this. The test with the finger is old saga material, but it was used only in connexion with an increase of strength or the securing of a horn skin and was not associated with the acquisition of an understanding of bird-speech. The basic form of the saga underlying these strophes must have been that Sigurd, after putting his finger into his mouth, felt his strength grow, and thereupon resolved to eat the heart.

In creating his verse, the poet made the bird advise Sigurd to eat the heart, and did not use the *motif* of the burned finger. The folk-tradition, however, retained the *motif*, and the redactor incorporated it in his work, but used it wrongly as a motivation for the understanding of the language of birds.

Gustav Neckel seemed to be in accord with Boer's opinions concerning this episode; but he called attention to the fact that the two *motifs*, the eating of the heart and the burned finger, were not blended in the older

tradition.[30] Léon Polak disagreed with Boer's view that the understanding of the bird's speech as a result of the "finger test" resulted from a misunderstanding on the part of the redactor, and held that the episode contained two *motifs*:[31] (a) the eating of the dragon's heart gives supernatural strength; (b) a drop of dragon's blood on the tongue teaches bird-speech. These *motifs,* he contended, are not contradictory. He further disagreed with Boer's opinion that Sigurd's eating the dragon's heart after he had tasted the dragon's blood constituted a repetition of the same *motif,* but was in agreement with the idea that the "finger tests" in the *Fáfnismál* and the *Seyfriedslied* had a common source in a very ancient stratum of the Sigurd-saga.[32]

In a comparatively recent study on the fight between Sigurd and Fáfnir, C. W. von Sydow discusses the episode of the burned finger and the speaking birds in considerable detail;[33] and his general thesis, in so far as it concerns this investigation, may thus be outlined:

> Having called attention to the fact that the German tradition except for the *Thidrekssaga* knows nothing of the episode of the burned finger, he states, as his opinion, that the *Thidrekssaga* has borrowed this episode from the Norse, not, however, from the form found in the *Edda,* but from some other version influenced by legends relating to the white snake's broth.
>
> Noting the fact that in Germanic folk-legends the hero tastes the broth, or the snake,

[30] *Beiträge zur Eddaforschung mit Exkursen zur Heldensage,* 1908, p. 226.

[31] *Untersuchungen über die Sigfridsagen,* Berlin, 1910, p. 49.

[32] *Op. cit.,* pp. 21 ff., 47.

[33] *Lunds Universitets Årsskrift,* New Series, XIV: 1 (1918).

through curiosity, he points out that in the story of Fearachur Leigh the hero, carelessly touching the hot kettle, puts his finger into his mouth;[84] and this accidental tasting of the serpent, he holds, shows a likeness to the episode in the *Fáfnismál* which must be more than merely accidental. He further asserts that in the folk-saga one does not meet, as a rule, any analogous form of the bird-speech *motif,* and, contending that in "The White Snake" the *motif* is a relatively fresh loan from folk-legends, he declares that the Gaelic story of Finn mac Cumaill stands in closer relationship to the episode in the *Fáfnismál* than does the legend of the white serpent.[85]

In his discussion of this Gaelic story, von Sydow points out that, except for the question of a serpent or a serpent's heart, the whole situation is the same as that in the story of Sigurd, Regin, and Fáfnir, and calls attention to the facts that (1) in both tales the hero is engaged in the task of cooking food for a sleeping man who is secretly his enemy, (2) in each version the hero burns his finger on the food and puts his finger into his mouth, thereby gaining supernatural knowledge that the sleeping one is his enemy who must be killed. He further asserts that this likeness is all the more weighty since the Finn-saga shows other points related to the Norse form of the Sigurd-saga, e.g., Finn, like Sigurd, is a posthumous son; he grows up in the woods under a foster-mother's guardianship; he comes to a smith—in some variants, his

[84] See Chapter V, note 1, and text, *supra.*

[85] Von Sydow gives a short summary of the story of Finn and the salmon of knowledge as found in modern Scottish and Irish tradition. Except for the fact that his summary contains the detail of the 'tooth of wisdom,' it is practically identical with the version entitled "How the Een was Set Up." See Chapter II, note 36, and text, *supra.*

mother's father—to get a sword; there is a room full of swords, but none of them holds when Finn swings it; through his mother's help he gets the smith to forge a new sword, etc. On the ground of these agreements in the stories of Finn and Sigurd, von Sydow holds that there must be an *actual story-relationship* and affirms that the Sigurd-saga has unquestionably been influenced by the Finn-saga, and that, because of this influence, it has departed from the German, in this case, the more primitive form.

Stressing the idea that in the legends of the white snake the hero usually tastes the serpent out of *curiosity* and not accidentally, as in the stories of Finn, he declares that the episode in the *Fáfnismál* points in a Celtic direction. This conclusion, he feels, is strengthened by the fact that in the Finn-saga the *motif* has a *fundamental significance* in that the supernatural power is of use constantly and always in Finn's life and is attributed to him in texts which antedate viking times,[36] while Sigurd has only once the use of his power to understand the speech of birds, viz., upon just that occasion when he acquires it. This, von Sydow contends, fits well with the idea that the whole story recorded in *Fáfnismál* was borrowed and fitted into the history of Sigurd without the addition of anything borrowed being fitted into other happenings of his life.

Von Sydow thereupon concludes that Gaelic material was taken over into the Sigurd-saga, and there, in part pushed aside, in part rebuilt; and he holds that the reason for such a borrowing lies in the fact that a certain likeness existed between the two sagas. Rejecting the idea

[36] Von Sydow refers here to the legends of Finn found in *Cormac's Glossary* and in the *Brehon Laws*. See Chapter I, notes 1, 2, 4, and text, *supra*.

that the finger test in the *Seyfriedslied* was the *motif* which drew to itself the episode about Fáfnir's heart, and that this *motif* thrust aside the invulnerability *motif,* he asserts that Sigurd's burning of his finger on the roasting heart seems to have no relation whatever to Seyfrid's examination of the melted horn as recorded in the *Seyfriedslied.* He does hold that the likeness between the invulnerability *motif* and the heart episode which could have caused the former to be crowded out by the latter exists rather in the fact that both are built upon belief relating to blood as a bearer of secret powers. He further observes that when the Norse saga attached the Finn-saga's wisdom *motif* to the dragon fight, it simultaneously recompensed the Gaelic saga-episode, not only so that it would better fit the surroundings but also in such a way that it would be in closer agreement with Germanic ideas.

In a study entitled *Altnordische Dichtung und Prosa von Jung Sigurd,*[87] Andreas Heusler discusses a number of von Sydow's conclusions, disagreeing with him concerning the source of the episode of Sigurd's burned finger, and concurring with Polak and Boer in assigning it to an ancient stratum of the Sigurd-saga.

Apparently, the conclusions of Boer, Polak, and Heusler regarding the source of the "finger test" in the story of Fáfnir are based in large measure upon the presence of the episode relating to the finger in the *Seyfriedslied* and upon similar incidents in the *Thidrekssaga.* As a first step in an attempt to determine the validity of the differing opinions regarding the source of the episode of the burned finger in the *Fáfnis-*

[87] *Sitzungsberichte der preuss. Akad. der Wissensch., Philosophisch-historischen Klasse,* Berlin, 1919, pp. 162 ff.

mál, one might suggest two questions: (1) Does the episode of the burned finger fit logically into the story? (2) What is the relationship between the episodes concerning the finger in the *Fáfnismál*, the *Thidrekssaga*, and the *Seyfriedslied?*

Concerning the first of these questions, Boer and Polak fail to agree. Boer maintained that in the episode of the burned finger and the speaking birds the prose introduced a *motif* (the drop of Fáfnir's blood on Sigurd's tongue being a motivation for the understanding of bird-speech) which was at variance with the idea contained in the verse (that the eating of Fáfnir's heart would give enormous strength) and that this *motif* in the prose was in reality only an idle repetition of that found in the poem. Polak contended that instead of including a repetition of the same *motif*, the author has employed two ideas: (a) the eating of the dragon's heart gives supernatural strength; (b) a drop of dragon's blood on the tongue produces an ability to understand bird-speech.[38] According to the prose before Strophe 31, however, Regin drinks blood from Fáfnir's wounds. Apparently, he did not do this for the purpose of acquiring an understanding of bird-speech, and one therefore sees the drinking of the dragon's blood used in the *Fáfnismál* to produce two different results. Although either an idea that the drinking of dragon's blood secures supernatural strength, or one according to which an understanding of bird-speech might be acquired in the same way, seems logical in itself, the story certainly contains a repetition of the same *motif*, and one is forced to the conviction, with

[38] See notes 31-32, and text, *supra*.

Boer, that the redactor, either ignorantly or wilfully, incorporated in the narrative a *motif* which the poem did not originally contain.

The source of this *motif* relating to the burned finger, which seems thus to have been incorporated in the *Fáfnismál* by the redactor, now becomes the point in question. According to the theory advanced by Boer, the verse portions of the *Fáfnismál* were based upon a story which told how Sigurd burned his finger on the roasting heart of the dragon, thrust his finger into his mouth, felt his strength increase, decided to eat the heart, ate the heart, and then killed Regin. In presenting this conclusion, Boer failed to make clear whether, in his opinion, the speaking birds existed in the basic tale underlying the verse version, or whether they were inventions on the part of the *Fáfnismál* poet and had no part in the basic story reflected by the verse. From Boer's argument one is led to the assumption that he held the latter idea.[39] But if the birds were not pres-

[39] In his discussion of this matter, *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie,* XXXVII (1905), 479-481, Boer advanced the opinion that the *Fáfnismál* as it now stands is the work of a redactor, who inserted the prose passages; that, in the verse which the redactor used, the birds spoke in the language of men, the understanding of which required the aid of no magic machinery; that the redactor misunderstood the idea of the poet and introduced a *motif* which was contradictory to the idea in the poem; and, further, that this *motif,* the "finger proof," was not invented by the redactor, but was an existing tradition, as is shown by the introduction of the *Seyfriedslied,* wherein Seyfrid touches the stream of horn with his finger. Concerning the "finger proof," its use in the *Fáfnismál,* and its connexion with the speaking birds, he asserts:

"Die probe mit dem finger ist also verhältnismässig altes sagengut. Aber sie hat nur da einen sinn, wo die widerholung der handlung (des schmierens oder essens) einen zweck hat. Also nicht, wo es sich um das verständnis der vogelsprache handelt, wol aber wo von einer hornhaut oder von einer meh-

ent in the basic tale, why did Sigurd kill Regin? To be sure, Fáfnir had warned him (Strophe 22) against Regin, but certainly the killing of his foe need not have been postponed until Sigurd had eaten the heart and thus gained Fáfnir's strength or until Regin was asleep. Of course, one might argue that Regin's desire to eat the heart caused Sigurd, who remembered Fáfnir's warning, to become suspicious and prompted his decision to kill his enemy; but under such conditions, since Sigurd did not need Fáfnir's strength in order to kill Regin, he would have proceeded at once to slay his enemy. In either event the incident relating to the burned finger and the consciousness of growing strength would be unnecessary. On the whole, it seems much more probable that Sigurd killed Regin because a bird advised that it be done. Apparently, then, Boer's

rung der kraft die rede ist. Eine vernünftige widerholung ist also auch das, dass Reginn, der schon von dem blute des drachens getrunken hat, dennoch dessen herz zu essen wünscht. Ich glaube, wir können auf grund dieser betrachtungen auch die den strophen der Fáfn. zu grunde liegende sagenform mit sicherheit reconstruieren. Die vorstellung muss die gewesen sein, dass Sigurðr, als er beim braten des herzens seinen finger verbrannte und darauf in den mund steckte, seine kraft wachsen fühlte. Darauf entschloss er sich, auch das herz zu essen. Als er das getan, tötete er Reginn.

Selten liegt ein fall vor, wo man einen alten dichter so bei der arbeit belauschen kann, wie hier. Die innere stimme wird plastisch nach aussen verlegt, sie wird zu einer vogelstimme. Aber während die innere stimme durch einen äusseren anlass,—das zufällige kosten von dem blute des herzens,—geweckt werden muss, redet der vogel aus sich selbst, und das motiv von dem verbrannten finger wurde überflüssig. Der dichter liess es unbenutzt. Aber die volkstümliche tradition hat das motiv behalten. Daraus hat der redactor es aufgenommen aber es sehr unrichtig benutzt, um dadurch das verständnis der vogelsprache zu motivieren. Wie durchaus er die bedeutung des essens missverstanden hat, ersieht man daraus, dass er (pr. nach 39) Sigurð auch Reginns blut trinken lässt! Einem solchen autor gegenüber hat man wol das recht, sich ausschliesslich an die strophen zu halten."

basic tale should include the speaking birds, which—immediately after Sigurd burned his finger, felt his strength to grow, and ate the heart—tell him of Regin's wiles and advise that this enemy also be slain. An assumption, however, that the birds were present in the basic tale postulated by Boer, and that, except for the suggestion that Sigurd eat the heart, they offered the advice as recorded in the *Fáfnismál*, likewise presents points to be considered. According to the verse portions of this story, the speech of the first bird contains the advice that Sigurd eat the heart. This is presumably because the bird knows of Regin's intention to kill Sigurd; the bird advises Sigurd in order that he may not only forestall Regin's eating the heart but may also increase his power. The birds then inform Sigurd of Regin's wiles and suggest that the hero kill him. In this verse rendition the bird's advice that Sigurd eat the heart articulates in a logical thought-sequence not only with the following admonitions of the birds but also with the idea that Regin had the heart roasted for his own consumption. The counsel that Sigurd eat the heart thus seems to be a constituent part of the tradition as a whole and properly to fit in as the first of the sequence of the speeches of birds. The theory that Sigurd decided to eat the heart because he felt his strength grow as a result of Fáfnir's blood coming upon his tongue, does not square with the following admonitions of the birds, nor does it—when contrasted with the idea that the bird advised eating the heart for the purpose of forestalling and killing an enemy—appear to be an adequate motivation for Sigurd's decision.

Furthermore, since Sigurd's killing of Regin seems to postulate the presence of the birds in Boer's basic story, it appears altogether unlikely that the poet would unnecessarily have discarded such a striking detail as that concerning the burned finger for the sake of giving the bird, or birds, another speech. Finally, the very fact that Strophe 31 appears in the *Fáfnismál* among other bird-speeches which apparently formed part of the basic story, argues that the matter of this strophe was associated with the other bird-speeches in a common source. All in all, it appears highly probable that in the basic story which underlay the poetic passages of the *Fáfnismál* the bird advised Sigurd to eat Fáfnir's heart. But if the counsel that Sigurd eat the heart was given by the bird, then there is no necessity either for the assumption regarding his decision to eat it because (as a result of Fáfnir's blood on his tongue) he felt his strength increasing or, indeed, for the episode of the burned finger. Aside from the fact that incidents relating to a finger are found in the *Fáfnismál*, the *Thidrekssaga*, and the *Seyfriedslied*, there seems to be no reason for Boer's inclusion of the "finger test" in his hypothetical basic story.

This leads us to a consideration of the second question, viz., that involving the relationship of the episodes concerning the finger in the *Fáfnismál*, the *Thidrekssaga*, and the *Seyfriedslied*. As has been noted above, the *Seyfriedslied* is preserved only in printed editions belonging to the sixteenth century,[40] though it is based upon old ballads, probably of the thirteenth century. The *Fáfnismál* in its present form existed in a written

[40] See note 18, and text, *supra*.

document of the thirteenth century,[41] and, if Kermode's dating of the carved stones is correct,[42] the tale, including the episode of the burned finger and the talking birds, was extant as early as the latter part of the eleventh century. Again, the incident concerning the finger in the *Seyfriedslied,* which may or may not have been part of the story prior to the sixteenth century, bears little resemblance to the "finger test" in the *Fáfnismál.* In the *Seyfriedslied,* Siegfried, as a result of his wonder at a brooklet which flowed from a mass of burning dragons, thrust his finger into this brooklet, and the finger became covered with horn. He did not insert his finger in his mouth, nor did he acquire anything from his act except a knowledge that the horn would harden, which, in turn, prompted the suggestion that he smear his whole body.

It should further be noted that the *Thidrekssaga,* composed in Norway about 1250 and preserved in a thirteenth-century manuscript,[43] contains not only an incident connected with the *motif* of the horn skin but also an episode similar to that of the burned finger in the *Fáfnismál.* According to the *Thidrekssaga,* Sigurd dipped his hand into a kettle in which he was boiling pieces of the slain dragon and in so doing burned himself. He inserted his finger in his mouth in order to cool it, and he then heard two birds talking together, one saying that it would be better if Sigurd knew what they knew, that Sigurd should kill Mime, since Mime

[41] See Sijmons and Gering, *Die Lieder der Edda,* I, i (1906), II-III, for date of the Codex Regius, in which the *Fáfnismál* is preserved complete.

[42] See note 27, and text, *supra.*

[43] See *Saga Didriks Konungs af Bern,* ed. C. R. Unger, 1853, p. XII; and note 14, *supra.*

had sent Sigurd there to be killed, etc. Thereupon, Sigurd took the blood of the dragon, besmearing both himself therewith "and his hands," and wherever the blood touched him, it became as if it were horn. Then he took off his clothing and besmeared his whole body except a spot between the shoulders, etc.

There can be no doubt that the incident of the burned finger and talking birds recorded here is a variant of the episode preserved in the *Fáfnismál*. Both von Sydow and Boer hold that it is a borrowing from the Norse tradition;[44] and the fact that the incident of the burned finger and the speaking birds and also the episode relating to the horn skin both appear in this section of the *Thidrekssaga* seems to justify this conclusion. Von Sydow asserts, however, that the composer of the *Thidrekssaga* has drawn from some form other than that found in the *Edda* and related poetry, a form which, in his opinion, had clearly been influenced by the legends about the white serpent's broth. Concerning this episode, Boer declares:[45]

> "Dass die stelle mit recht auf den einfluss der nordischen tradition zurückgeführt wird, wird dadurch bewiesen, dass die echte darstellung unmittelbar darauf folgt; Sigurðr bestreicht sich mit dem blute des drachens. Das stimmt mit der einleitung des Sigfridsliedes überein. Das wahrscheinlichste ist, dass die quelle des capitels wie die einleitung des Sigfridsliedes die nachricht, dass Sigfrid mit dem finger das blut des drachens berührte, enthielt, und dass der verfasser dadurch an die officielle darstellung von Fáfn. (mit prosa) erinnert wurde, was ihn dann zu der aufnahme von

[44] Boer, *op. cit.*, p. 481; von Sydow, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
[45] *Loc. cit.*

> motiven aus dieser quelle veranlasste. Vielleicht gehört auch hierher, dass Sigurðr Mímir tötet; in der einleitung des Sigfridsliedes kehrt er nach dem drachenkampf nicht zu dem schmiede zurück. Und sicher ist so die unsinnige vorstellung, dass der held den drachen in stücke schneidet, um sich eine mahlzeit zu bereiten,— von der er nachher kein stück zu sich nimmt,— zu beurteilen."

As in the passage from Boer's study discussed above, the conclusions stated in the latter part of this excerpt are not convincing. The episode of the burned finger in the *Thidrekssaga* is admittedly borrowed from Norse tradition; it immediately precedes statements that Sigurd besmeared himself "and his hands" with the blood of the dragon; and that where the blood touched him, it became as if it were horn, whereupon he besmeared his whole body with the blood of the dragon and thus acquired a horn skin. It is also true that, according to the *Seyfriedslied,* Siegfried dipped his finger into the brooklet of melted horn, and, when the horn cooled on his finger, he smeared his whole body. It is, however, difficult to see how these facts can establish a conclusion that either the source of this chapter or the introduction to the *Seyfriedslied* contained the idea that Sigurd touched the blood of the dragon *with his finger.* On the other hand, the facts that, according to this thirteenth-century account, Sigurd smeared his hands with blood, thus causing them to become covered with horn, and that there is no hint that he touched the blood with his *finger,* afford equally good grounds for concluding (1) that the use of the finger as recorded in the *Seyfriedslied* was not a part of the original *motif* which concerned the bath in dragon's blood, and (2)

that the brooklet of horn and the dipping of the finger therein were late developments (perhaps including reflections from Norse tradition) in the *Seyfriedslied.* Blood on the hands of a hero who has slain a dragon is a natural consequence. Furthermore, if a hero learned that blood on his hands produced a horn skin, it seems quite natural that his next step would be to smear his whole body. On the whole, the learning that blood on the hands produced a horn skin and the smearing of one's body with the blood seem to be proper and logical sequences of thought in an invulnerability *motif.* Instead of furnishing a basis for the conviction that the source of this chapter of the *Thidrekssaga,* so far as it concerns the acquisition of a horn skin, contained an idea that Sigurd touched the blood of the dragon with his finger, its explicit allusion to "the hands" would seem to indicate that such was not the case.

It goes without saying that the episodes relating to the acquisition of a horn skin in the *Thidrekssaga* and the *Seyfriedslied* are variants of the same *motif.* Which of these two incidents more nearly preserved the original form of the common source seems to be the important question. Boer's contention that the earliest version made the hero touch the dragon's blood with his finger is apparently based solely on the fact that episodes involving the use of a finger appear in the *Fáfnismál* and the *Seyfriedslied,* and is not convincing. Statements in the *Fáfnismál* and the *Völsungasaga* concerning the trench in which Sigurd takes his stand and which is filled with blood, seem to be remnants of an invulnerability *motif* now lost in Norse tradition. The appearance of these statements regarding the

blood, together with the use of the blood in the *Thidrekssaga,* makes it relatively certain that the smearing with the dragon's blood more nearly resembles the original form of this invulnerability *motif* than does the smearing with melted horn. Furthermore, the allusion to the blood-covered arm in the *Völsungasaga* and the direct statement concerning the blood-stained hands in the *Thidrekssaga* indicate that, according to the common source of the episodes relating to the horn skin in the *Thidrekssaga* and the *Seyfriedslied,* the hero's *hands* became encased in horn, and no statement was made concerning a *finger.* Von Sydow's contention that the idea of the stream of melted horn is a comparatively late rationalization of the original *motif* (a smearing with blood) which has been influenced by stories of places freed from serpents through burning, is apparently well founded, as is his conclusion that the detail regarding the finger in the *Seyfriedslied* is a comparatively late development in this story.[46]

On the whole, there seems to be no adequate reason for believing that the Sigurd-saga contained an episode in which a finger was inserted in the mouth until that detail appeared in the *Fáfnismál;* or that it contained an episode in which a finger was used to touch blood, a heart, or a brook of melted horn before that incident was recorded in the *Seyfriedslied.*

How, then, may one explain the presence of the details regarding the finger in the *Fáfnismál* and the *Seyfriedslied?* The *Fáfnismál's* association of the tasting of the dragon's (serpent's) blood with an ability to understand the speech of birds points at once to the

[46] *Op. cit.,* pp. 30, 33, and 34.

great mass of ancient and modern legends in which a serpent is the medium for attaining either supernatural wisdom or an ability to understand the language of birds or other animals. As von Sydow has indicated,[47] in the legends of the white snake the tasting of the serpent is generally brought about through the curiosity of the hero, while in the Sigurd story the tasting of the dragon's blood comes by chance. This is evidently a different *motif*. Furthermore, he likewise argues, with good reason, that the great mass of legends relating to the acquisition of bird-speech through the medium of a serpent contains no story-*motif* analogous to that found in the episode of Sigurd and the burned finger. Several tales relating to a serpent and including an episode in which a finger plays a part have been discussed in the preceding chapter. The stories of Fearachur Leigh, Gilleadha, and Sir James Ramsay are, without doubt, relatively modern developments of the legend of the white snake which have incorporated the episode of the burned finger, a borrowing from the Finn-saga.[48] The story of Michael Scott and that of the Breton workman are obviously variants of the same white-snake legend, one of which (Michael Scott) shows a detail regarding a finger. Although the fact that Michael Scott dips his finger into the pan and, out of curiosity, tastes the broth that clings thereto raises a question concerning the source of the finger in this episode, it seems altogether probable that, since the story has a Scottish setting, the incident relating to the finger may be attributed either to the influence of similar Scottish tales or directly to an Irish source.

[47] Note 34, and text, *supra*.

[48] See Chapter V, notes 39, 40, and text, *supra*.

Two stories, each of which contains a detail relating to a finger, remain to be considered: (1) the Esthonian legend of the man who touches the snake, puts his finger into his mouth, and thus gains an understanding of what is spoken by the grass and by the cock; and (2) the tale of "Goldenhair," in which a boy dips his finger into a kettle, finds that his finger has become gilded, and bathes his whole body (or only his hair), which also becomes golden-coloured.[49] At the outset, one may note that both are taken from oral tradition and may be relatively late developments. The first of these tales is in some respects similar to the episode in the *Fáfnismál,* but since the touching of the snake comes as a result of its own advice and the insertion of the finger in the mouth is merely a substitution for eating the snake, it seems clear that no story-relationship exists between them. In like manner, the legend of "Goldenhair" bears some resemblance to the episode in the *Seyfriedslied* in that the hero touches a fluid with his finger and, as a result of what he learns from his act, bathes his whole body. One is tempted to suspect that this story has borrowed the *motif* from the *Seyfriedslied.* Von Sydow, however, held that such was not the case, contending that the resemblance is probably a mere coincidence since the situations in the two cases are entirely unlike, and since the reasoning which underlies the two *motifs* must be considered exceedingly common and natural; and he further asserts that no connexion can be traced between the invulnerability *motif* of the Sigurd-legend and the folk-sagas.

How, then, may we account for the appearance of

[49] Chapter V, notes 41, 42, and text, *supra.*

the finger in the two stories just cited? As von Sydow has suggested, it is a perfectly natural act of curiosity to touch something with the finger, while the discovery of hidden virtues by such means and their subsequent employment would obviously form a logical and desirable *motif* for story-tellers, a number of *motifs* of this nature probably developing uninfluenced by each other. Such an evolution, von Sydow held, accounts for the details in "Goldenhair,"[80] and it may also explain the detail regarding the finger in the Esthonian story and, possibly, in that of Michael Scott, although Irish influence appears highly probable in the latter case. On the other hand, the Esthonian story may have been influenced by tales of Sigurd, and "Goldenhair" may be an imitation of the *Seyfriedslied.* In any event, the appearance of the finger in the *Fáfnismál* and the *Seyfriedslied* cannot be traced to either of these tales. One might, it is true, suggest that the tradition regarding the eating of a serpent and the consequent understanding of bird-speech formed the genesis of a Continental *motif* in which a finger that had touched a snake, or the blood of a snake, was inserted in the mouth, and that the details regarding the finger in the *Fáfnismál,* the *Seyfriedslied,* the Esthonian tale, the story of "Goldenhair," and perhaps in that of Michael Scott, might be traced thereto; but such an assumption appears to be unwarranted since there seems to be no evidence that the Sigurd-saga contained any incident even remotely resembling this prior to the appearance in the *Fáfnismál* of the episode concerning the burned finger and the roasting heart, and since the

[80] *Op. cit.,* p. 31. In this connexion one is reminded of "A Dissertation on Roast Pig" by Charles Lamb.

motifs in the *Seyfriedslied,* the Esthonian story, and "Goldenhair" are so utterly unlike that contained in the *Fáfnismál.*

On the whole, the evidence fails to show: (1) that prior to the appearance in the *Fáfnismál* of the episode concerning the burned finger and the speaking birds an incident even remotely resembling this one, or from which this episode might plausibly be considered to have developed, was ever connected with the Sigurd-saga; (2) that the appearance of the finger in the *Seyfriedslied* is anything other than a natural change, possibly influenced by the episode in the *Fáfnismál,* from a hand used in an original invulnerability *motif* to a finger, which would fit better with the stream of melted horn, a development from the original idea of a bath in dragon's blood; (3) that the detail relating to the finger in the Esthonian story is anything other than an independent development or a creation in imitation of tales of Sigurd; and (4) that the legend of "Goldenhair" may not be either an independent development or an imitation of the *motif* contained in the *Seyfriedslied.* Furthermore, a review of the evidence and of the arguments alleged in its support fails to disclose any adequate reason for a belief that prior to the appearance in the *Fáfnismál* of the incident concerning Sigurd's burned finger and the roasting heart Continental tradition knew of any similar *motif* which might have served as a source for the episode in the *Fáfnismál.*

It then appears that the person responsible for the episode in the *Fáfnismál,* knowing traditions relating to the acquisition of an understanding of bird-speech

through the eating of a serpent's flesh or blood, either invented the incident of the burned finger or created his *motif* in imitation of some story which he knew. There is convincing proof for an assertion that such a *motif* existed in early Irish tradition. A story that Finn mac Cumaill became possessed of the power of divination through the insertion of a thumb (or finger) in his mouth was not only extant in Ireland in pre-viking days, but was widely distributed there. Furthermore, during this same early period, Irish lore was familiar with at least two different stories purporting to explain the origin of Finn's thumb or finger of knowledge, neither of which, however, contained any suggestion of a burned finger. Again, as von Sydow has observed, in the Finn-saga the magic finger has a fundamental significance in that Finn constantly obtains supernatural knowledge by inserting his finger in his mouth, whereas Sigurd enjoys this power only on the single occasion when through it he acquires a knowledge of the speech of birds. Finally, as Boer pointed out, the episode of the burned finger in the *Fáfnismál* contains a contradictory usage of *motifs,* which suggests that something has been inserted in the Sigurd-saga. A consideration of these facts, together with a lack of evidence that the episode of the burned finger was extant in the Sigurd-saga prior to its appearance in the *Fáfnismál* and the knowledge that since viking days there had been ample opportunity for the interchange of ideas between the Irish and the Northern peoples, furnishes strong ground for an assumption that that portion of the Sigurd story which relates to the burned finger and its insertion in the mouth can be attributed to an Irish source.

In his discussion of these Irish and Norse tales, von Sydow has also called attention to the fact that there is a striking similarity between a number of features preserved in the *Fáfnismál* and in the story of Finn. Sigurd, like Finn, is engaged in cooking—Sigurd, a dragon's heart, Finn, a magic fish—for a sleeping enemy. Both, as the result of information gained through putting a burned finger into the mouth, bring about the death of this hitherto secret foe. Further, he points out that the Finn-saga contains yet other features which indicate a relationship to the Norse form of the Sigurd-saga. Finn, like Sigurd, is a posthumous son, a feature which, although especially common in Celtic hero-poems, seems to be absent from most Germanic tradition. Again, like Sigurd, Finn grows up under the guardianship of a foster-parent, comes to a smith to get a sword, and destroys several swords in an attempt to find a superior one. Remembering the lively intercourse between the Irish and the Northern peoples in post-viking days and the fact that the Norse tradition concerning Sigurd's childhood is not in accord with Germanic versions, von Sydow advances the conclusion that there is an actual story-relationship between the tale of Sigurd as preserved in the *Fáfnismál* and that of Finn cited in this study; and he further asserts that these facts fit well with the idea that the whole story recorded in the *Fáfnismál* has been borrowed and fitted into the history of Sigurd without the addition of anything borrowed having been fitted into other happenings in his life.

Heusler, disagreeing with von Sydow's views con-

cerning the relationship between the *Fáfnismál* and tales of Finn, declared:[51]

> "Allein, Finns Erleuchtung beruht in diesen wiederholten Szenen nur darauf, dasz er den Finger in den Mund führt und (nach einigen Fassungen) seinen Weisheitszahn berührt; nur diesem Motiv sichern alte Quellen den vorwikingischen Ursprung. Davon ist zu trennen der Gedanke des nordischen Liedes: dasz der Saft von dem wunderbaren Tiere die Kenntnis verleiht. Dies kommt bei Finn nur in der Szene vom Fischrösten in Frage, und auch da tritt es nicht klar heraus: die modernen Fassungen bei Curtin und Campbell stellen es so dar, dasz Finn den am Lachse verbrannten Finger in den Mund steckt und damit zum erstenmal die Bewegung ausführt, die ihm fortan das höhere Wissen verschafft; von dem Safte des Fisches ist nach dem ganzen Zusammenhang keine Rede. Dies sieht in der Tat aus wie das Anflicken eines miszverstandenen Zuges an einen anderen, damit nicht vereinbaren. Die im ganzen von dem Eddalied viel weiter abliegende Fassung bei Zimmer a. a. O., Kuno Meyer, Ériu I, 180 ff., zielt zwar auf das Essen des Fisches; dies macht Finn, der die Dichtkunst lernen will, wissend. Aber auch hier ist sowohl das Daumenverbrennen wie das gewohnheitsmäszige Daumen-in-den-Mund-stecken widersprechend angefügt. In der Sigurddichtung ist der ganze Hergang logisch aufgebaut. So dürfte sie doch der gebende Teil sein."

Conclusions presented by Heusler in the foregoing passage invite further consideration. First, the earliest Irish stories of Finn's thumb of knowledge, for the

[51] *Sitzungsberichte der preuss. Akad. der Wissensch., Philosophisch-historischen Klasse,* Berlin, 1919, pp. 165-6.

most part, know nothing of a 'tooth of wisdom.'[52] Nor does this detail appear either in the *Macgnímartha Finn* or in the version of the tale most commonly found in Irish oral tradition.[53] In the ancient texts Finn's act generally consists of the mere insertion of his thumb (or finger) in his mouth and chanting through *teinm laida* or *imbas forosna.* As has been indicated in a preceding chapter, and as Heusler has observed, the episode of Finn and the cooking salmon in the *Macgnímartha Finn* contains a contradictory usage of the *motif* of the salmon of knowledge. We have seen also that early Irish tradition associates the salmon with the art of poetry in that it eats the nuts of the hazel, a source of poetic inspiration. Furthermore, *imbas forosna, teinm laida,* and *dichetal do chennaib* were rites belonging to the poet. It appears not unlikely that Ireland had a tradition that the eating of a magic salmon insured poetic ability. Nor would the existence of such salmon by any means preclude the existence in Irish lore of a story in which Finn burned his finger on a cooking salmon, put his finger into his mouth, and thus attained supernatural wisdom. On the contrary, the existence of the one would suggest the existence of the other. When one remembers that the composer of a literary composition is likely to be a learned person, familiar with lore of all kinds, and that he is endeavouring to set forth a literary product, one

[52] See Chapter I, notes 2, 6, 8, 12, and text, and Chapter III, notes 14-20, and text, *supra.*

[53] See Chapter II, notes 7, 33-41, and text, *supra.* Cf. A. Nutt, *Folk-Lore Record,* IV (1881), 1 ff., 13 ff.; J. G. Campbell and A. Nutt, *The Fians,* 1891, pp. 20, 27; A. C. L. Brown, *Modern Philology,* XVIII (1920-21), 216, 665 ff., notes; J. Curtin, *Myths and Folk-Lore of Ireland,* 1890, pp. 211 ff.; G. Henderson, *The Celtic Review,* I (1904-5), 360 ff.

might expect to find in such work not only a modification of basic tales and a mixing of old traditions but also a creation of new *motifs*.[54] In the light of these considerations it appears altogether possible that the contradictory *motifs* in this episode of Finn and the cooking salmon may have resulted from the combination of two Irish traditions: (1) an idea relating to the attainment of poetic ability through eating a magic salmon; (2) the story of Finn and the burned finger.

As early as the ninth century, perhaps earlier, there were two different, but apparently related, tales purporting to explain the reason for the phenomenon that Finn became possessed of the power of divination through inserting a thumb or finger in his mouth; but neither of these contained any suggestion of the *burned* finger. These tales, as well as that of the salmon of knowledge, which may, in all probability, be dated prior to the twelfth century, purport to account for the same phenomenon in different ways. In each of them Finn's act is associated with *teinm laida* or *imbas forosna,* a circumstance which suggests that the composer considered it related in some way to these magic practices. It has already been shown that in *dichetal do chennaib,* a rite closely associated with *teinm laida* and *imbas forosna,* the finger or thumb was, in all probability, inserted in the mouth. This corresponds exactly with the act attributed to Finn and prompts the conclusion either that Finn's act had its origin in *dichetal do chennaib,* whatever may have been the origin of this rite, or, which seems less likely, that Finn's act, springing from some other source, acquired the name *dichetal*

[54] Concerning this point, see Nutt's discussion, *Folk and Hero Tales,* ed. MacInnes, 1890, pp. 413 ff.

do chennaib and gave rise to the magic practice. In any event, it appears certain that, detached from any story, the idea was current that Finn became possessed of the power of divination by inserting his finger or thumb in his mouth. It also seems highly probable that some composers or redactors knew Finn's act only as a bit of independent lore having no connexion with any story or magic practice, that some knew it to be connected with certain magic rites belonging to a poet, and that these composers or redactors invented new tales to account for the phenomenon or adapted those already in existence.

A question next suggests itself concerning the date and origin of the Irish story of Finn's burning his finger on the cooking salmon. If the composer of the original tale, the basis of the twelfth-century literary version, knew only as a bit of detached lore the tradition that Finn acquired divining power through inserting his thumb in his mouth—a tradition which was current in Ireland in the ninth century—may not this story of Finn's burned finger have been created, as Heusler has suggested, in imitation of the similar episode concerning Sigurd, the cooking salmon being substituted for the cooking heart, and the incident of the burned finger being used to account for the ancient Irish tradition concerning Finn's thumb (or finger) of knowledge?

In connexion with such an assumption, questions at once arise concerning the extent of the imitation. Did the Irish author take merely the details regarding the cooking heart and the burned finger and insert them in an episode similar to that in the *Macgnímartha Finn* in

which Finn seeks to learn poetry? Probably not, since the story found in Irish oral tradition is more nearly parallel to that preserved in the *Fáfnismál,* a fact which suggests that, if the Irish composer imitated the incident of the burned finger and the cooking heart, he likewise copied the details concerning the cooking for Regin, the killing of Regin, etc. The question is, then, merely whether the Finn story was made in imitation of the *Fáfnismál,* or the episode in the *Fáfnismál* was created in imitation of that of Finn. But, is it not possible that the story of Finn and his enemy and that of Sigurd and Regin may be traced along independent lines to a common source, and that the incident of the cooking heart and Sigurd's burned finger may have been imitated in the story of Finn? In answer to such a question, one might inquire as to the nature of the incidents in such an hypothetical story of Finn and his enemy which might have been replaced by the imitation of the cooking heart and the burned finger.

Evidence in support of a conclusion that the episode of the burned finger in the Sigurd-saga was blended with the ancient Irish tradition concerning Finn's thumb (or finger) of knowledge seems to be limited to the following facts: (1) the incident of Sigurd and the burned finger appears in the Codex Regius, a manuscript of the thirteenth century; (2) the *Macgnímartha Finn* is found in no manuscript earlier than the fifteenth century, although it is reasonably certain that the text, including the episode of Finn and the cooking salmon, may be assigned to the twelfth; (3) a contradictory use of the *motif* of the salmon of knowledge, which, however, may logically be explained as an

amalgamation of two Irish traditions, is apparent in the *Macgnímartha Finn.* Evidence against such a conclusion seems to be as follows: (1) traditions concerning Finn's thumb (or finger) of knowledge were current in Ireland in the ninth century; (2) as far as known, no *motif* in which a finger is used to touch blood or a heart, or is inserted in the mouth, is found in Continental tradition prior to the appearance of the incident in the *Fáfnismál,* nor is there apparently any reason to believe that such a *motif* existed in Continental tradition prior to that time; (3) the episode in the *Fáfnismál* contains a contradictory use of *motifs* for which there seems to be no logical explanation. On the whole, the evidence appears altogether inadequate to justify Heusler's assumption. Furthermore, there is reason to believe, as has been indicated in a preceding chapter,[55] that the episode recorded in the *Macgnímartha Finn* was founded on a story of Finn and the cooking salmon not dissimilar from that related in "How the Een was Set Up,"[56] and that this basic legend was extant in Irish lore probably as early as the ninth century.

A possible explanation of the Irish story of the salmon of knowledge may, then, be advanced as follows: Having their roots in the primitive tradition that particular powers might be attained through eating the flesh or drinking the blood of certain animals, tales developed on the Continent as well as in Ireland. Among Celtic peoples—probably in Ireland, since the episode

[55] See Chapter II, notes 43-61, and text, *supra.*
[56] See Chapter II, note 36, and text, *supra.*

seems to be associated only with Finn in Celtic tales[57] —the salmon, which was of major importance in Irish fauna and which apparently had a sacred or wisdom-giving significance in Celtic lore, became the creature about which certain Irish traditions developed. One of these associated the salmon with the hazel and the "nuts of poetic inspiration," thus investing the salmon with attributes connected with the art of poetry. In close relationship with this tradition of the salmon and the art of poetry, a *motif* may have developed in which Finn, a reputed *fili,* burned his thumb on the cooking salmon, and thereafter possessed the power of divination whenever he put his thumb into his mouth. There seems to be little doubt that the detail concerning the insertion of the burned thumb (or finger) in the mouth originated in Ireland, possibly in connexion with the magic fish. There is, however, a remote possibility that it was a part of a basic tradition to which both Irish and Continental stories may be traced. The wide and early distribution of the legend in Ireland, however, together with the lack of evidence that a tradition concerning the insertion of a burned finger in the mouth ever existed in Continental lore—or anywhere else except in Ireland—prior to its appearance in the *Fáfnismál,* makes it appear relatively certain that the episode of the burned finger may be attributed to an Irish source. Furthermore, although it appears highly probable that *dichetal do chennaib* had its origin in magic lore relating to the human hand, and that the episode con-

[57] A variant of this episode is included in the story of Gwion Bach, a Welsh personage, but, as has been pointed out above, Chapter IV, the Welsh incident is, in all probability, borrowed from the Finn-saga.

cerning the cooking salmon and the burned finger was invented to explain the apparent use of magic fingers in the operation of this rite, it may be possible that the idea concerning the acquisition of the power of divination through inserting a finger in the mouth had its origin in a story relating to the cooking of a magic salmon, and that the tradition, becoming detached from the story, or even existing as a detail of it, received the name *dichetal do chennaib* 'incantation from the ends [of the fingers],' which became associated and confused with the other magic practices *teinm laida* and *imbas forosna* as part of a poet's stock in trade. The composers of the other stories purporting to explain the origin of Finn's magic finger then either created their tales in imitation of this story of the salmon of knowledge or made them in explanation of the tradition regarding the magic finger, which had become detached from the legend of the salmon of knowledge and existed as a floating bit of lore in some way connected with the magic practices attributed to the poet. Such an hypothesis may account not only for the origin of *dichetal do chennaib* but also for the fact that certain forms of the story of the salmon of knowledge—which may be developments from the original tale—have no allusions to *imbas forosna, teinm laida,* or *dichetal do chennaib,* while other versions, the work of learned scribes who knew that the inspiring finger was in some way connected with the magic practices of the poet, included statements concerning these rites.

Von Sydow's suggestion, however, that the story preserved in the *Fáfnismál* contains borrowings from

the Finn-saga, invites further consideration. Since it appears highly probable that the story of Finn summarized by von Sydow closely resembles the early form of the legend of the Irish salmon of knowledge, the story of Sigurd exhibits what seems to be an unmistakable relationship with the Irish tale as regards the posthumous birth, the foster-father, the smith, the cooking for a sleeping secret enemy, the insertion of the burned finger in the mouth, and the subsequent killing of this enemy. Certain questions, however, present themselves concerning the nature of the Germanic story into which the Irish borrowings were apparently fitted. Without attempting to enter into an investigation of the development of the *Reginsmál* and the *Fáfnismál* within the Sigurd-saga, one may gain some enlightenment regarding the method of their construction by a glance at the episodes included in them. At the outset, there seems to be no question about the assignment of episodes concerning Otr and Loki, Andvari's hoard, Hreithmar and his three sons, Sigurd's slaying the dragon, Regin's and Sigurd's drinking the blood of Fáfnir, the speaking birds, the details relating to Grani, and the acquisition of the dragon's hoard, to a Continental source. Speaking birds do not appear in the Irish story of the salmon of knowledge, nor are talking birds of this character common in early Irish tradition. It is true that speaking birds are found in certain ancient Irish stories, but they are, for the most part, thought to be of a supernatural character, and they speak in the language of men.[58] The birds in the

[58] O'Curry, *Manners and Customs,* I (1873), cccIxx, and note; II (1873), 224; Joyce, *A Social History of Ancient Ireland,* I (1903), 231-2; MacCulloch, *The Religion of the Ancient Celts,* 1911, p. 247.

Fáfnismál are apparently ordinary birds. They speak in bird-language and, knowing Regin's plans, discuss the affair among themselves as it appears to them; they are identical in character with the speaking birds of the Germanic stories of the white snake and, for that matter, with the speaking birds of Classical tradition. In fact, as Boer noted, speaking birds appear elsewhere in the Nibelungen-saga, although in the case of Atli and Högni the birds talk in the language of men, an understanding of which does not require the use of magic machinery. Norse tradition also includes the well-known incident relating to the bird that whispers into the ear of Ódin in the language of men. As in the case of the birds, the same may be said of the dragon, as well as of the detail relating to Sigurd's and Regin's drinking the blood.[59] Neither of these features is common to ancient Irish tradition, and the latter *motif* appears to be a Continental development from the primitive notion of acquisition of strength, wisdom,

[59] According to the *Táin bó Fraich,* a tale preserved in *LL* (Facs.), 248a, Fraich engages in combat with a *beist,* some sort of an uncanny monster that lives in a lake. For data concerning this tale, see Thurneysen, *Königsage,* pp. 285 ff. This creature, called a *piast* (Lat. *bestia*), frequently appears in later Irish stories but is utterly unlike the traditional, fire-breathing, lizard-like dragon of Continental lore. Concerning this subject, see D'Arbois, *ZCP,* IV (1903), 456 ff.; Cross, *Modern Philology,* XVIII (1920-21), 446; *OS,* II (1854), 55; and VI (1858), 122-3; George Henderson, *The Celtic Dragon Myth,* Edinburgh, 1911, pp. xi ff., 18 ff., and 33 ff. Although the Irish *piast* may have been a development from Continental sources, it seems clear that the *piast* is not the Greek *dracōn* (Lat. *draco*), nor are any creatures similar to the dragons in *Fáfnismál* or the *Beowulf* common to early Irish tradition. Concerning the allusion to the two dragons which appears in the ancient Irish tale of the two swineherds, see Chap. IV, note 26, and text, *supra.*

or an ability to understand bird-speech through eating the flesh or drinking the blood of some magic animal.

In conformity, then, with the assumption that the composer of the *Fáfnismál* drew upon both Irish and Continental tradition for the matter from which the story of the *Fáfnismál* was constructed, the development of this Norse story may, perhaps, be explained as follows:

> Details in the history of Sigurd, whatever it may have been with relation to Germanic or other sources, were superseded or supplemented in Norse tradition by details from an Irish source. These Irish features, as noted above, include the posthumous birth, the foster-parents, the idea of the smith as applied to Regin, and the entire story of Finn and the salmon of knowledge as related in "How the Een was Set Up," which, with the exception of the detail of the tooth of knowledge, is similar to the tale outlined in von Sydow's study. The Irish story of the salmon of knowledge may, indeed, have replaced an invulnerability *motif*. Certain features from non-Irish, probably early Continental, sources, however, were retained,[60] these including the basic

[60] The term "Continental" is used here to include not only Continental features but also such as may have developed among the Anglo-Saxons in England. Sophus Bugge (*The Home of the Eddic Poems,* tr. Schofield, London, 1899, pp. 373 ff.) makes the following declaration: "German scholars, above all Müllenhoff, long ago exploded a theory, which earlier had been pretty generally accepted in Scandinavia, that the story of Sigurth Fáfnisbani and the Niflungs belonged in the beginning to the Scandinavians as well as to the Germans. It is certain that the story of Sigurth, Sigmund's son, and of the Niflungs was originally a West-Germanic story, foreign to the Scandinavians." He, likewise, states, pp. 373-4, that most German investigators consider that the form of the story concerning the Völsungs and the Niflungs, known in Scandinavia from the *Eddic* poems and the *Völsungasaga,* went from Germany northward. See Symons, Paul's *Grundriss,* II, i (1893), 23, and Mogk, *Forschungen zur d. Phil., Festgabe*

idea relating to Andvari's hoard and the three sons of Hreithmar, Sigurd's fight with the dragon, Regin's, and possibly Sigurd's, drinking the blood of Fáfnir, the speaking birds, and the belief that certain powers might be acquired through eating the flesh or drinking the blood of a dragon (serpent) or other magic adversary. The birds in this Continental lore may have spoken in the language of men, the understanding of which needed no magic machinery. On the other hand, the understanding of the bird-speech might have been associated with the drinking of serpent's blood. These details were blended together with (Fáfnir's heart being substituted for the salmon of knowledge) and modified to fit (the burned finger of the Finn story being wrongly used as a motivation for the un-

für Rudolf Hildebrand, 1894, pp. 1 ff. Bugge thinks, however, that the Scandinavians adopted the story of the Völsungs (which, in his opinion, influenced the Helgi stories) in the West, especially in the British Isles, and particularly by association with Englishmen, who became familiar with these tales partly through poems composed in Anglo-Saxon. The Englishmen, he held, also knew stories, originally Frankish, of other saga-heroes, e.g., the Merovingian kings. He further held that other Völsung stories in the poetic *Edda* and in the *Völsungasaga* were, in like manner, first composed by Scandinavians in the West, partly with Anglo-Saxon poems as models. "The Lay of Wayland," the oldest Norse poem which mentions the story of the Völsungs, he considers as having been composed in England. Golther, *Germania,* XXXIII (1888), 469, 476, asserts that the knowledge of the story of the Niflungs first came to Danish and Norwegian Vikings in France, and that the story spread among the Vikings in the West and came over from Ireland to Iceland. He mentions no Englishmen or English poems in this connexion. In summing up, Bugge declares (*op. cit.,* p. 376) : "It seems, therefore, not only possible but even probable that the nucleus of the poetic Edda was not first gathered in Iceland, or even in the Shetland Islands, or in the Orkneys, but that the Norwegians who travelled now in England, now in Ireland, possessed the oldest and indeed most of the Eddic poems, already united into one collection, perhaps even as early as the middle of the eleventh century."

derstanding of bird-speech) the details from Irish sources, thus furnishing the material for the poetic work or works which, through the incorporation of new features or the blending of several versions of this work, developed into the story of the *Fáfnismál* as preserved in the so-called *Edda*.

It will, of course, be admitted that a composer collecting ideas wherever he finds them may invent new details and modify his matter to suit his fancy in the creation of his story. On the other hand, one is tempted to wonder why, if the composer of the *Fáfnismál* were basing his tale on the Finn story, he should have included the speaking birds at all. They do not appear in the Finn story, nor were they necessary in the *motif;* in fact, in order to incorporate them in an imitation of the Finn-saga it would have been necessary to change the *motif*. On the whole, it appears possible that the speaking birds are present in the *Fáfnismál* because they formed part of a Continental story which concerned Sigurd's fight with a dragon. But, if the birds were features of a Continental story, what did they say? Certainly in the Continental tale they did not advise either the eating of the heart or the killing of Regin; these features, according to our assumption in the explanation projected above, are traceable to an Irish source. The birds in the Continental tale might have advised Sigurd to take Fáfnir's gold, but this would have been unnecessary, since Fáfnir was killed for that very purpose. It is, of course, possible that the composer of the *Fáfnismál* invented the speaking birds and changed the *motif* in his imitation of the Finn story so that the insertion in his mouth of the blood-

stained finger became a motivation for the understanding of bird-speech (a *motif* for which he had Classical and, probably, Continental precedent) instead of a motivation for the acquisition of supernatural wisdom. There is, however, the possibility that the speaking birds were features of the Continental story which entered into the construction of the *Fáfnismál;* in such an event, since the first group of bird-speeches in this poem (Stanzas 32-38) concerns the killing of Regin and the eating of the heart, it appears not impossible that both the sleeping Regin as here depicted and the cooking heart were found in the Continental tradition along with the speaking birds. This idea that the character Regin may not be exclusively borrowed from the Finn story is somewhat strengthened by a glance at other Germanic tales. In both "Seyfrid I and II,"[81] the hero is reared by a foster-parent, and in the first of them the youth's life is sought by this foster-parent, who is markedly similar to Regin not only in character but also in the fact that he is a smith. Unless one may assume that the foster-fathers in the *Seyfriedslied* and the *Thidrekssaga* are reflections of Regin in the Norse tale, then, in conformity with the idea that the foster-father and smith are Irish features, these details in the *Seyfriedslied* and the *Thidrekssaga* must likewise be considered as traceable to an Irish source. When one remembers Wieland (Wéland, Völund), the famous smith of Germanic legend who made Beowulf's coat of mail, and Vulcan of Classical lore (who appears in Irish tradition as Bolcan), a question arises as to whether the Continental detail regarding the smith,

[81] See note 18, and text, *supra.*

and, indeed, even that of the foster-father as applied to Regin in the *Reginsmál* and the *Fáfnismál,* can with any degree of certainty be attributed exclusively to an Irish source, or whether these features in the Continental tales and the similar episodes in Irish tradition may not be traceable along independent lines to a common root.[62]

From a consideration of the foregoing facts and conclusions, one is tempted to wonder whether Continental tradition may not have known a story—or, perhaps, several stories which were afterward blended—wholly free from Irish influence and including the episodes of Otr and Loki, Hreithmar and his three sons, Sigurd's fight with the dragon, Regin's and Sigurd's drinking the blood of Fáfnir, Sigurd's roasting the dragon's heart for the sleeping Regin, the speaking birds, and the bird-speeches preserved in the *Fáfnismál.* This Continental lore may have included the tradition—reflected in the *Fáfnismál* in the roasting of the heart and the bird-speeches—that one might acquire strength by eating a dragon's (serpent's, *wurmes*) flesh or drinking its blood. It may also have comprised a belief that understanding of the language of birds might be gained in the same way.

In the light of the preceding observations, a second tentative explanation of the relationship between the *Fáfnismál* and the story of Finn may be projected:

> As it is preserved in the Codex Regius, the *Fáfnismál,* including prose and verse, is the work of a redactor, who is responsible for the

[62] Cf. O. Schrader's chapter "Der Schmied in Sage und Sprache" in his *Sprachvergleichung und Urgeschichte,* 3d ed., Jena, 1906, II, i, 13-28.

presence of the episode of the burned finger (a borrowing from the Irish) and the inharmonious blending of the two *motifs*. Since the *Völsungasaga,* which in all probability drew from sources other than the material preserved in the so-called *Edda,* and the *Snorra Edda* both contain the episode of the burned finger, these works are apparently based upon, or have been influenced by, the revamped *Fáfnismál.* There is also reason to believe that all these works may again have been revised, perhaps several times, before they assumed their present form, since both the *Fáfnismál* and the *Völsungasaga* contain certain passages which are not preserved in the other or in the account in the *Snorra Edda.*

Immediately underlying the work of the redactor is the work of the poet, or possibly of several poets, which the redactor may have blended in his composition. All of these poetic compositions may have included prose passages.[63] The details contained in the poetic work, or works, included the tale of Andvari's hoard and the three sons of Hreithmar, Sigurd's fight with the dragon, Sigurd's roasting of the heart for Regin (in order that Regin might acquire the dragon's strength), and the advice of the birds. In this case the birds presumably speak on their own initiative and in the language of men, the understanding of which, as in the case of Atli and Högni, required no magic machinery.[64] On the other hand, this poetical work (or works) may have reflected the tradition that an understanding of bird-speech could be acquired by tasting

[63] See Sijmons and Gering, *Die Lieder der Edda,* I, i (1906), CLXII ff. Cf. Bertha S. Phillpotts, *The Elder Edda and Ancient Scandinavian Drama,* 1920, pp. 100 ff.

[64] See note 29, and text, *supra.* Cf. Sophus Bugge, *The Home of the Eddic Poems,* translated by W. H. Schofield, London, 1899, pp. 87 ff.; Frazer, *Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild,* II (*The Golden Bough,* Part V), 3d ed., London, 1912, 146.

the dragon's (serpent's) flesh or blood. Several sources may have contributed to the matter included in this poetical composition, or these poetical compositions. They may have developed in Celtic territory, even in Ireland, from a number of Norse or Germanic legends which supplied the story of Hreithmar's three sons, Sigurd's fight with the dragon, Sigurd's roasting the dragon's heart, the speaking birds, and the traditions relating to eating the dragon's heart and drinking his blood.[65] These Norse and Germanic features, blended in various combinations and at different times, may have been combined with certain details, possibly from Irish tradition, viz., the posthumous son, the blacksmith, the trial of the sword, etc., thus furnishing the material on which was based the poetic work or works later worked over and remodeled by the redactor. On the other hand, and this assumption seems to be the more likely one, the traditions underlying the story as outlined in the poetic portions of the *Fáfnismál* may be entirely free from Irish influence and may have developed in Teutonic territory from a source to which the saga of Finn may also be traced along independent lines.[66] There are cer-

[65] See note 59, and text, *supra.* See also Sophus Bugge, *op. cit.*, pp. xv-xviii; Sijmons, *Die Lieder der Edda,* I, i (1906), CCLXXVIII ff., CXXXIII ff.; Winifred Faraday, *The Edda,* "Popular Studies in Mythology, Romance, and Folklore," No. 12, 1902, pp. 1 ff., and 46 ff.; *The Volsunga Saga,* tr. Magnusson and Morris, Viking Edition, 1906, pp. 7-8.

[66] See Chapter II, notes 50, 51, and text, *supra.* See also J. G. von Hahn, *Sagwissenschaftliche Studien,* Jena, 1876, pp. 200 ff., 264 ff., and 340 ff.; Nutt, *Folk-Lore Record,* IV (1881), 1 ff. It has been pointed out in a foregoing chapter, *loc. cit.*, that Nutt's inclusion of the incident of the salmon of knowledge in his version of the "Expulsion-and-Return-Formula" (*op. cit.*, pp. 2, 36) is based largely upon the appearance of the episode of the burned finger in the Celtic stories, including the *Hanes Taliesin,* and in the *Fáfnismál.* It has also been indicated above, Chapter IV, that in all probability the

tain facts, however, that do not fit well with either of these possibilities. The posthumous birth is, indeed, a common feature in Celtic tradition and, as von Sydow asserts,[67] does not seem to be a frequent *motif* in the early tradition of Germanic peoples. It will also be recalled that the boyhood history of Sigurd as recorded in the Norse documents is not in accord with other accounts of Sigurd's youth. On the other hand, the idea relating to the smith as a foster-father seems to be a feature prevalent not only in early Irish but also in early Teutonic tradition.[68] Again, although Finn's testing of the sword may have formed a part of the early

incident of the burned finger in the *Hanes Taliesin* is directly borrowed from the Finn-saga; and the same seems to be true of that episode in the *Fáfnismál*.

If, however, as von Hahn and Nutt held, the story of Sigurd belongs to the group of tales of the "Expulsion-and-Return-Formula," and if one may assume that the story of Finn is an Irish representative of the same group, it would not be difficult to imagine that a Norse episode relating to the acquisition of strength or an understanding of bird-speech through eating the heart or drinking the blood of a magic adversary (possibly included in a primary story of Sigurd and the dragon) and the Irish episode relating to Finn's acquisition of supernatural wisdom through tasting the magic salmon, might be incidents traceable along independent lines to a common source, viz., some incident relating to the attainment of certain powers through eating the flesh or drinking the blood of an adversary, this incident being present in the "Aryan Expulsion-and-Return-Formula."

[67] Von Sydow, *op. cit.*, p. 40. See also Nutt, *op. cit.*, p. 43; von Hahn, *op. cit.*, table opposite p. 340.

[68] In this connexion it need only be remembered that Cuchulinn (*Cú Chulainn* 'The Hound of Culann') gained his name as a result of his slaying the watch dog of Culann the Smith. See von Sydow, *op. cit.*, pp. 19 ff., for a discussion of the idea relating to the smith as a foster-father and its connexion with the *Starke Hans* folk-saga. See also Panzer, *Studien zur germ. Sagengeschichte,* II. *Sigfrid,* 1912, who has pointed out that in the Sigurd-saga the hero's rearing by the dwarf, the slaying of the dragon, the winning of the hoard, etc., are details postulating a close connexion between the story of Sigurd and the folk-tale of the bear's son.

Finn story, it first appears with relation to Finn in relatively modern tales. It is found, however, in connexion with the youthful exploits of Cuchulinn, and, even though one may not state that Sigurd's destruction of the swords is directly traceable to an Irish source, one may positively assert that an episode in which a hero destroys several weapons before he finds one suited to his strength was existent in very ancient Irish lore.[69] On the whole, it appears relatively certain that the feature in the *Fáfnismál* relating to the burned finger may be attributed to an Irish source, and not improbable that the testing of the sword and the posthumous birth may likewise be of Celtic origin. It seems barely possible, furthermore, that the idea of the smith, like that of the foster-father in the *Fáfnismál,* may also be traced to Irish tradition, although, as indicated above, it appears rather more likely that these features, together with similar ones found in Irish lore, are independent developments from a common source.

Whatever may have been the sources of the matter underlying the poem, or poems, it appears highly probable that, in this work of the poet (or poets), the redactor, attracted by the

[69] See J. Dunn, *Táin Bó Cúalnge,* 1914, p. 61. It may further be noted that the statement contained in the *Reginsmál* (Sijmons and Gering, *op. cit.,* pp. 312-3) concerning Sigurd's sword and the floating wool finds counterparts in passages preserved in the *Táin* which relate that the edge of Cuchulinn's sword "would cut a hair against the stream with its keenness and sharpness," and, again, that the edge of his shield would do the same thing. For these passages, see Dunn, *op. cit.,* pp. 189, 251, and Thurneysen, *Königsage,* p. 180. A similar statement occurs in that part of the *Fled Bricrend* known as 'The Champion's Covenant,' where it is related that the sharpness of Curoi mac Dairi's axe was such that it "would lop off hairs, the wind blowing them against its edge." See Henderson, *Fled Bricrend* (*ITS,* II), London, 1899, p. 117, and Loomis, *Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance,* New York, 1927, p. 50.

likeness between the roasting heart of the *Fáfnismál* story and the cooking salmon in the Irish tale of Finn, borrowed the incident of the burned finger from the latter and inserted it as a prose passage in his redaction of the *Fáfnismál,* though he used it wrongly as a motivation for the understanding of the bird-speech which his source already contained. In accord with this explanation it appears (1) that, underlying the work of the redactor, there may have been two or more poems which the redactor patched together, or (2) there may have been a single composition which the redactor used as a basis for his work. If the former of these assumptions be accepted, then it is possible that these poems used by the redactor may have contained a tradition relating to the acquisition of an understanding of bird-speech through eating a serpent's flesh or drinking its blood. These several poems the redactor patched together, borrowing from Irish tradition the incident of the burned thumb, with which he supplanted the tradition relating to the acquisition of an understanding of bird-speech through eating the flesh or drinking the blood of a serpent (dragon) as found in the poetic work or works. In such case the redactor would be responsible not only for the blending of several poems relating to Sigurd's fight with the dragon but also for amalgamating the tradition concerning the acquisition of an understanding of bird-speech through eating the flesh or drinking the blood of a dragon with the belief that eating a dragon's flesh or drinking its blood gave to one the dragon's strength. He would also be responsible for the insertion and wrong use of the Irish episode of the burned thumb as a motivation for understanding of bird-speech. There is the possibility, however, that, underlying the

work of the redactor, there was a single composition which included both prose and verse and which had been patched together by a composer from earlier versions after the manner just indicated of the redactor. Under such conditions, the composer would be responsible for blending the two *motifs* (one concerning the acquisition of strength, the other the understanding of bird-speech, from the dragon's flesh or blood). The redactor would then be responsible only for the intrusion and incorrect use of the borrowed burned thumb as a motivation for the understanding of bird-speech. Again, there is the possibility that the tradition associating the tasting of a dragon's flesh or blood with an understanding of bird-speech existed neither in one single tale nor in any of several tales which may have underlain the work of the redactor, and that in the poem, or poems, which formed the basis of his work the birds spoke in the language of men, an understanding of which required no magic powers. It might then be assumed that the redactor, introducing the episode of the burned thumb from Irish tradition in his compilation of several works (or his reworking of a single story), was influenced by the primitive tradition concerning the tasting of a serpent's flesh or blood as a motivation for understanding bird-speech, and that he modified this Irish episode in conformity with the primitive idea.

A third hypothesis regarding the relationship of the similar stories of Finn and Sigurd may be formulated thus:

(1) The story of Finn's cooking the salmon for the malevolent fisherman was made in imitation of the Norse story of Sigurd as related in the *verse* portions of the *Fáfnismál;*

(2) the Irish author introduced the Irish magic salmon to take the place of the cooking heart; (3) he also invented the incident relating to the insertion of the burned finger or thumb in the mouth as an explanation of the very ancient Irish tradition regarding Finn's magic thumb or finger, a tradition traceable to *dichetal do chennaib,* which, in turn, had its origin in a belief concerning magic powers associated with the human hand; (4) with this incident relating to the burned finger or thumb—which he had invented—he replaced the speaking birds of his Norse original; (5) the composer of the *Macgnímartha Finn* rearranged, adjusted, and adapted this Irish story to fit into his literary composition; (6) the redactor of the *Fáfnismál,* knowing the Irish story—made in imitation of the *verse* portions of the *Fáfnismál* itself—borrowed from the Irish story the incident relating to the burned finger and inserted it as a prose passage following Strophe 31 in his redaction.

It is obvious that these explanations can be nothing more than tentative conjectures. Because of the similarity of the episode in which Finn cooks the salmon for the sleeping enemy to that in which Sigurd cooks the heart for the sleeping Regin, and the fact that except in the *Fáfnismál* and immediately related tales there is nothing to indicate that an incident in any way resembling the insertion of a burned finger in the mouth ever belonged to the Sigurd-saga, one is tempted to favour the first of the explanations. Yet when it is recalled that in the stories of the white snake the servant—having cooked the snake and having violated the command of his master in tasting it—acquired an understanding of bird-speech, the similarity of this

tale to that of Sigurd and also to the legend of Finn points toward a fourth explanation, which may thus be stated: (1) the stories of Finn and the salmon and Sigurd and the heart, as well as the Continental legends of the white snake, may be traced along independent lines to a common source; (2) according to this source, the hero cooks a magic animal for his master, who is a sorcerer (sometimes a smith), and, in violation of the master's command, tastes the animal and acquires magic powers; (3) in the Irish development the salmon became the magic animal, and the incident of the burned finger was invented to explain Finn's inspiring finger, a feature belonging to the rite *dichetal do chennaib;* (4) the episode of Sigurd, Regin, the roasting heart, and the prophetic birds, developed under the strong influence of tales similar to those of the white snake, but borrowed the incident of the burned finger directly from the Finn-saga. On the whole, the last explanation seems to be the one most strongly suggested by the facts at hand. Whatever may be the relationship between these tales of Sigurd and Finn, there is, however, one deduction that can be made with comparative safety in connexion with the episode of the burned finger. Even were one willing to grant that a *motif* relating to the insertion of a burned finger in the mouth existed in ancient Continental tradition, and that the finger-episodes in the *Fáfnismál,* the *Seyfriedslied,* and the Esthonian story of the man and the snake were developments therefrom, there is insufficient evidence to establish even a slight probability that the Irish episode of the thumb of knowledge can be traced to a Norse source. There is, on the other hand, ample

evidence to establish a strong probability that the episode of the burned finger in the *Fáfnismál* was directly borrowed from the Irish Finn-saga.[70]

[70]After this volume had been made ready for the press, Heinrich Hempel's *Nibelungenstudien, I, Nibelungenlied, Thidrikssaga, und Balladen,* Heidelberg, 1926, reached me. On pages 215-229, Hempel calls attention to several of the ancient tales treated in Chapters I and II, *supra,* and discusses a number of parallels found in Irish and Norse tradition, including that which concerns Sigurd's burned finger. It is gratifying to note that his views regarding the source of the burned finger in the *Fáfnismál* are closely in accord with the conclusions presented in this chapter.

CHAPTER VII

FINN MAC CUMAILL AND THE TRADITION OF THE THUMB OF KNOWLEDGE

If conclusions developed in the foregoing chapters are well founded, possible explanations may be set forth for the curious stories connected with the celebrated Finn. As has been pointed out above, two very ancient traditions existed in early Irish lore. One of these was a form of charm against illness or injury which attributed a magic significance to the act of washing in a basin of water, putting something into the mouth, and then inserting two fingers in the mouth. The other, *dichetal do chennaib,* one of three magical incantations supposed to constitute part of the stock in trade of a poet, was performed in some way through the ends of the fingers or bones, probably involving the insertion of a thumb or finger in the mouth. Either of these two magic rites may have been derived from the other; they may have been independent developments springing from a common root; or they may have been evolutions arising in different sources and without relationship one to the other. In any event, it is possible that both go back to an Irish phase of the very ancient belief in the magic or sacred powers of the human hand. The two modes of incantation associated with *dichetal do chennaib* were, in their general nature, somewhat similar to this rite. *Imbas forosna* was a form of prophetic sleep induced by placing the palms upon the face. It may likewise have had its origin in the magic or sacred beliefs concerning the

hand. *Teinm laida* was a type of rod-divination arising, perhaps, in a sacred tree-cult.

Before the beginning of the tenth century, and probably much earlier, a tradition was current to the effect that Saint Patrick, tolerating *dichetal do chennaib,* had abolished *teinm laida* and *imbas forosna.* It also seems clear that before the end of the tenth century these three terms had lost their definite significances, and that there was great confusion concerning the fitting of the names to the *modus operandi* of the incantation, although memories of the names remained, as well as reminiscences of the nature of the operations. Furthermore, it appears that, according to pagan concepts, *dichetal do chennaib* was the least important of the three. Under such conditions it seems not unlikely that either of the terms *imbas forosna* or *teinm laida* may have been used as a name to designate the operation employed in *dichetal do chennaib,* or may have been employed indiscriminately to designate any of these magic rites. The association, then, of either of these terms, *imbas forosna* or *teinm laida,* with the operation employed in *dichetal do chennaib* would appear to be a natural consequence.

Since Finn's act and the procedure belonging to *dichetal do chennaib* appear to be practically identical, and since his insertion of his finger in his mouth is frequently associated with *teinm laida* (once, at least, with *imbas forosna*) in early texts, it appears relatively certain that Finn's power of divination and *dichetal do chennaib* are intimately related. On the basis of this assumption, several hypotheses may thus be presented in explanation of Finn's curious gift.

First, possibly through confusion with Find fili mac Rossa Ruad,[1] possibly as a mere addition to other attributes possessed by the popular hero, Finn became known as a *fili* and therefore was thought to be able to perform the three magic rites of the poet. But, as has been indicated above, *dichetal do chennaib* did not fall under the ban of Saint Patrick, and accordingly Christian scribes would probably emphasize this rite over the other two in connexion with a popular hero. Finn's insertion of his thumb or finger in his mouth might therefore be explained simply as his performance of *dichetal do chennaib,* a practice possibly traceable to a belief in the magic power of the human hand. It has also been indicated above that the procedure in *dichetal do chennaib* may have been known by the name of either of the other rites, and it further appears not improbable that this procedure might have been extant as a tradition wholly dissociated from the name of any magic practice. Assuming that such may have been the case and that the procedure of *dichetal do chennaib*—detached from the name of any magic rite, but known to be in some way connected with the art of poetry as well as with the power of divination—was attributed to Finn, stories may have been invented or adapted to explain the magic thumb or finger. It will be recalled that the salmon, apparently a sacred fish, was associated with the magic nuts of the hazel and the art of the poet.[2] It has, furthermore, been pointed out above that there may have been a tradition in Irish lore (an Irish development of the widespread primitive idea that supernatural powers could

[1] See Chapter III, note 37, *supra.*

[2] See Chapter II, notes 57-60, and text, *supra.*

be attained through eating the flesh or drinking the blood of certain animals) according to which it was thought that one might gain poetic ability through eating a magic salmon. If such a story had been extant —and the conflicting *motifs* in the *Macgnímartha Finn* seem to point toward such a conclusion[8]—it would have been a very simple step for an author to account for Finn's magic finger (a development from *dichetal do chennaib,* a rite which, in turn, might be traced to a belief in the magic power of the hand) and its connexion with the art of poetry or with the possession of supernatural wisdom by means of a story in which the finger was burned on the sacred fish and thus imbued with magic qualities.

Since, however, the inspiring finger of *dichetal do chennaib* and also the magic salmon both seem to be associated with the art of poetry, a question at once arises regarding the relationship of the one to the other with respect to this common feature. The magic finger shows a legitimate relationship to the art of poetry, not only through *dichetal do chennaib,* a practice of the poet, but also through *imbas forosna,* likewise related to poetic inspiration and traceable to the magic power of the hand. But what of the salmon? It might be argued that the tradition of Finn's magic finger—tracing its origin to a magic belief in the power of the hand, and associated with the art of poetry—was extant in Irish lore; that some story-teller invented a tale in which he accounted for the magic finger by having it burned on the sacred fish, after the manner indicated above; that the salmon had not been associated with

[8] See Chapter VI, note 54, and text, *supra.*

poetry heretofore, but that thereafter it became connected with poetic inspiration and the magic hazels from its use as a source of the inspiring finger. Since in ancient lore the *fili* was thought to be gifted with supernatural powers as well as with poetic ability, one might expect to find any magic or sacred object traditionally related in some way to poetic inspiration. On the whole, there seems no reason to believe that the salmon attained its poetic significance from *dichetal do chennaib,* and it appears not improbable that in ancient lore *dichetal do chennaib* and the sacred salmon were associated with the art of poetry wholly independent of each other.

There is, however, another possible explanation of Finn's magic finger which deserves consideration. Tracing its origin to the basic idea that supernatural powers could be attained through eating the flesh or drinking the blood of certain animals, a story-*motif* developed in Ireland according to which Finn burned his finger on a cooking salmon, a sacred fish related in some way to the art of poetry; the finger became imbued with the magic qualities of the fish; and thereafter, when he put his finger into his mouth, he was possessed of the attributes of the *fili,* viz., the power of divination or the ability to compose poetry. It might further be assumed that later Finn's method of divination, having become separated from the story of the cooking salmon, was designated by the name *dichetal do chennaib,* simply an Irish expression descriptive of it, and that, since the finger had become associated with poetry through touching the magic fish,

dichetal do chennaib was grouped with the other rites belonging to the poet.

In accordance with a third hypothesis, it may be assumed: (1) that *dichetal do chennaib* had its origin in a belief concerning the power of the human hand; (2) that an incident relating to a magic finger also developed, after the manner just indicated, in a story which concerned the attainment of supernatural wisdom or the art of poetry through eating a sacred salmon; (3) that these two traditions regarding the magic finger and the acquisition of supernatural wisdom or poetic inspiration, traceable to independent sources, were later fused into one, and the name *dichetal do chennaib* was lost.[4]

Since the first hypothesis appears to furnish a relatively logical reason for the development of a detail concerning the insertion of a finger in the mouth, it seems to be the most probable of the three.

On the basis of these tentative explanations, the charm preserved in the codex of Saint Gall might, then, be considered as having developed from *dichetal do chennaib* or as having a common source with it in primitive beliefs in the magic powers of the human

[4] All three of these explanations seem to be at least in partial agreement with the idea held by Canon J. A. MacCulloch, who asserts (*The Mythology of All Races,* III [1918], 166) that the tradition of Finn and the salmon of knowledge is based on the universal idea regarding supernatural knowledge or an understanding of the language of beasts as acquired by eating part of an animal, often a snake. He further holds that, as told of Finn, the story is a folk-tale formula applied to the Irish hero, though the conception ultimately rests upon a belief in the beneficial results from the ritual eating of a sacred animal possessed of knowledge superior to man. See also MacCulloch, *The Religion of the Ancient Celts,* Edinburgh, 1911, p. 149, and note.

hand. It is possible, however, that this charm may have been a development from the primitive belief in the supernatural powers of the human hand and entirely unrelated to *dichetal do chennaib,* a rite which, indeed, might have originated in the story of Finn and the magic salmon. Whether or not any of the foregoing hypotheses furnishes a correct explanation for the origin of Finn's thumb (or finger) of knowledge, it is certain, on the whole, that in very early times there was a tradition that Finn became possessed of the power of divination through inserting a thumb or finger in his mouth. It further appears highly probable that this tradition—which seems to have been a development from beliefs concerning the human hand, although it may have had its origin in a story of Finn and the cooking salmon—became dissociated from all magic practices and stories of any kind, and that, therefore, different stories were invented to explain it.

On the basis of these facts and conclusions, possible explanations may be formulated for the various episodes relating to an inspiring thumb or finger. It has been indicated above that the episodes of the burned finger in the *Hanes Taliesin,* the tale of Fearachur Leigh, and the stories of Sir James Ramsay, Gilleadha, and Michael Scott are all, apparently, traceable to an Irish source. It also seems relatively certain that the details of the burned finger in the *Fáfnismál* and related tales are likewise borrowings from the Irish story of Finn. Although there may be a very remote possibility that the episode of the burned finger in the story of Sigurd is a Continental development which may be traced along independent lines to a source common

with that of the burned finger in the Finn story,[5] or that it is an independent Continental development having no relationship whatever to the Irish episode, there does not appear to be the slightest possibility that the Irish episode is a borrowing from the Norse tradition.

What, then, may be said of the Irish stories and statements concerning Finn's magic thumb or finger? With the knowledge of a tradition—which may have been considered to be any one of the three magic incantations, or which may have been known dissociated from any magic practice or story—that Finn became possessed of supernatural wisdom through putting his finger into his mouth, certain redactors either adapted old stories or invented new ones to account for the origin of this magic thumb or finger. Tentative explanations of the origin and development of these stories have been presented in foregoing chapters; and these may here be reviewed.[6]

Apparently, Irish tradition knew a very ancient tale concerning an adventure between a hero and a goblin. Having its roots in this ancient legend, a story, designated **X* above, developed relating to Finn's slaying of a fairy man named Cúldub. It appears possible, then, that the composer of **X*, knowing the tradition regarding Finn's thumb of knowledge, created and inserted in his story (**X*) an episode in which Finn

[5] See MacCulloch, *The Mythology of All Races*, III (1918), 168, who states that Finn's birth story is a development from the Aryan "Expulsion-and-Return-Formula."

[6] See the hypotheses regarding origin, development, and relationships of the stories concerning Finn and Cúldub, Finn and the fairy woman, Finn and Aed, etc., in Chapter I, and the tentative explanation of the origin and development of the story of Finn and the salmon of knowledge in Chapters II and VI.

smashed his thumb in the door of a supernatural dwelling as the result of meeting a fairy woman, a character existent in the source of *X. Such an incident would account not only for the supernatural power in the thumb but also for the insertion of the thumb in the mouth. In conformity with this explanation, it would appear that the stories which in Chapter I we have designated by the letters *H*, *Y*, and *Z* are all developments from this hypothetical *X. The composer of *Y*, however, seems to have omitted any allusion to the fairy woman and to have connected the smashing of the thumb directly with the pursuit of Cúldub. A second explanation of the development and relationships of these stories relating to the origin of Finn's magic thumb or finger postulates the existence of a very ancient story, *O, similar to that outlined by O'Curry, according to which Finn smashes his thumb or finger as the result of his pursuit of a fairy woman. The composer of this tale, knowing the tradition relating to Finn's magic thumb or finger, accounted for the power in the finger as well as for the putting of the finger into the mouth, as in the preceding explanation, through the device of the fairy-mound and the slammed door. This explanation further postulates a story, *B, relating to Finn's slaying of Cúldub, a tale having its origin in the ancient legend of the hero and the goblin (*A) but containing no allusion to a fairy woman or a smashed finger. Using *B as a basis for his composition, then, the composer of *X borrowed the detail of the smashed finger from the story of Finn and the fairy woman (*O), but omitted any allusion to the woman; and in the construction of his story (*X) he associated the smashing of the finger directly with Finn's attempt

to enter the fairy-knoll in pursuit of Cúldub. If the nature and development of *X may thus be explained, Y may be considered an elaborated rendering of *X. It may then be further assumed that, based on *X, a story *XX developed, in which the incident of the fairy woman with the pitcher, a further borrowing from *O, was incorporated; that H evolved from *XX; and that O'Curry's printed story (Z) is directly traceable to *O. A third explanation assumes that *X was a development from a basic story relating to Finn's slaying of a goblin; that the author of *X drew upon *O for the episode which concerns Finn's smashing of his thumb as the result of his pursuit of the fairy woman, and inserted this incident in his composition; and that H and Y both developed directly from *X, the author of Y, however, omitting the detail regarding the fairy woman, a feature present in *X. A fourth explanation postulates the development of *X as outlined in the explanation preceding, but assumes that the composer of *X borrowed from *O merely the detail regarding the smashing of the finger, omitting all reference to Finn's pursuit of the fairy woman. It further assumes that H and Y developed directly from *X, the composer of H, however, borrowing from *O the feature of the fairy woman, which he incorporated in his work. As indicated above, none of these explanations may be considered as more than a conjecture; but, of the four, the fourth appears to be the most plausible. For the details of these hypotheses, see the discussion in Chapter I.

There are, however, certain features connected with the stories designated H and Y which should, perhaps,

receive further consideration. It will be noted that, according to *H*, Finn's *finger* is smashed in the door. In *Y*, the door is closed on his *thumb*. Furthermore, although, according to *Y*, Finn's *thumb* is smashed in the door, the scribe asserts that others attribute the supernatural wisdom to the fact that Finn inserts in his mouth as much of his *finger* as had entered the knoll. A question at once arises as to whether **X*, the hypothetical source of *H* and *Y*, regarded Finn's *finger* or *thumb* as smashed in the door of the fairy-knoll. Since in the story "Finn and the Man in the Tree"—a tale which is undoubtedly as old as the story of Finn and the fairy woman (*H*), and which in the manuscript uninterruptedly follows the story of Finn and the fairy woman—Finn's divining power is incited through the use of a *thumb*, and since other statements earlier than the tenth century mention a *thumb* rather than a finger in connexion with Finn's magic power,[7] one is tempted to conjecture that in **X* a *thumb*, and not a *finger*, was smashed in the door of the knoll. Moreover, since a thumb and a finger might easily become confused in the composition of a story, it seems not improbable that the composer of *H* or the composer of some tale intermediate between **X* and *H* changed a thumb in **X* to a finger in *H*.

It has likewise been pointed out that *H* associates the insertion of the finger in the mouth with *imbas forosna;* and for a number of reasons it seems probable that the commentator on the *Ancient Laws* was responsible for this allusion to the rite: (1) although

[7] For these stories and statements, see Chapter I, notes 2, 3, 8, 12, and text, *supra*.

Finn's putting of his thumb or finger into his mouth is associated with *teinm laida* in other early accounts, nowhere except in *H* does it appear to be connected with *imbas forosna* in texts previous to the tenth century; (2) neither O'Curry's story, the latter part of which is very similar to *H*, nor *Y*, which is apparently a development from **X* (the source of both *H* and *Y*), contains any statement concerning *imbas forosna* or other form of incantation; (3) on the assumption that the meanings of *imbas forosna, teinm laida,* and *dichetal do chennaib* had become uncertain and that Finn's act was known to be related in some way to these incantations, it is difficult to see why anyone should attach the name *imbas forosna* to Finn's insertion of his finger in his mouth in this story unless he had a definite reason for so doing. As has previously been indicated, this tale (*H*) is used by the commentator on the *Ancient Laws* in explanation of the phrase *imbas forosna.* It is not impossible that he was casting about for an example to explain the term. He may have known that Finn's putting his finger into his mouth was related in some way to the magic rites used by the poet and that *imbas forosna* constituted part of the bard's stock in trade. Or, in the general state of confusion regarding the terms *imbas forosna, teinm laida,* and *dichetal do chennaib,* which he knew as belonging to the poet's art, he may have considered *imbas forosna* to be the name of the related rite *dichetal do chennaib.*

According to the ancient story preserved in *Cormac's Glossary,*[8] Finn identified the headless body of

[8] See Chapter I, note 2, and text, *supra.*

the buffoon, Lomna, by putting his thumb into his mouth and chanting through "tenm láido"; and an explanation of this association of Finn's act with *teinm laida* apparently lies in a confusion of the terms *teinm laida, imbas forosna,* and *dichetal do chennaib.* Whatever may have been the origin of the tradition relating to Finn's power of divination, in very early times his insertion of his thumb in his mouth was thought to be intimately related to *dichetal do chennaib,* and, in the confusion concerning the incantations belonging to the *fili,* was designated by the name of any one of the magic practices.

The method of inciting the divining power as described in the tenth-century tale "Finn and the Phantoms" presents a new problem.[9] This story asserts that Finn chanted through *teinm laida* and put his thumb under his "knowledge tooth," whereupon things unknown were revealed to him. The association of the term *teinm laida* with the thumb of knowledge may be explained as in the case above; but the idea relating to the thumb as the source of the divining power seems to have given place to a notion that the source of this ability was in the "knowledge tooth" (*dét fis*). At once a question arises. If the tooth be the source of the power, why should the thumb be inserted in the mouth at all? A possible explanation for this association of the thumb of knowledge with a tooth of knowledge seems to be that certain redactors, ignorant of the significance of the magic thumb in Finn's act, attributed the power attained by the insertion of the thumb in the mouth to something within the

[9] See Chapter I, note 3, and text, *supra.*

mouth, and, seizing upon a certain bit of floating lore regarding a tooth, blended it with Finn's putting his thumb into his mouth, but placed the magic power in the tooth rather than in the thumb.

At this point, attention may be called to a remote possibility that the entire tradition of the magic finger, including the incantation *dichetal do chennaib,* may have had its inception in a tradition relating to a magic tooth of wisdom. In accord with such a possibility, it might then be assumed that, in the general confusion regarding this form of divination, certain redactors, ignorant of the detail relating to the magic tooth but knowing that Finn attained supernatural wisdom by inserting his thumb in his mouth, attributed to the thumb the magic properties belonging to the tooth, and invented stories to account for its supernatural powers. As has been pointed out above, if the magic power reposed in the tooth, there seems to have been no reason why a thumb should be put into the mouth at all, even to press it against the tooth. On the whole, it appears highly probable that the tradition regarding Finn's magic thumb need not be considered as having had its origin in a tradition regarding a "knowledge tooth."[10]

According to a description of Finn's divining operation preserved in the late twelfth-century *Acallam na Senórach,*[11] water was brought to Finn in a golden vessel. In this water he washed his "kingly face," and then, when he put his "thumb under his knowledge-tooth, truth was revealed to him, and he said:" etc.

[10] For a bibliography on Finn's "tooth of knowledge," see Cross, *Modern Philology,* X (1912-13), 295, note 2.

[11] See Chapter I, note 23, and Chapter II, notes 3, 4, and text, *supra.*

This version apparently arose from a curious mixture of earlier traditions, a charm like that given in the Saint Gall manuscript supplying the basin of water and such a legend as that preserved in "Finn and the Phantoms" furnishing the inspiring thumb and the "tooth of knowledge." If an allusion to *teinm laida* or to either of the other magic practices belonging to the poet was ever associated with the inspiring thumb or the "knowledge tooth" of this version, it would seem to have been lost.

We have already suggested three tentative explanations to account for the tradition of Finn's thumb of knowledge. First, it might be assumed that Finn's act had its source in *dichetal do chennaib,* traceable to a belief in the magic power of the hand; that it became detached from the name of the rite, and that some author accounted for it by inventing the detail of the burned finger, which he fitted into the tradition relating to one's attainment of poetic ability by eating a magic salmon. The second postulates that, out of the primitive notion concerning the attainment of supernatural powers through eating the flesh or drinking the blood of certain animals, a tradition developed in Irish lore according to which the eating of a sacred salmon gave to one the attributes of a *fili,* viz., the ability to compose poetry and the power of divination; that, on the basis of this tradition, a story-*motif* evolved which concerned Finn's burning his finger on the cooking salmon and his accidental attainment of the divining power; that the tradition of his divining power became detached from the story of the cooking salmon, acquired the name *dichetal do chennaib,* and was grouped with

the rites belonging to the poet. The third explanation presumes that the tradition concerning Finn's insertion of his finger in his mouth developed from the story of the cooking salmon, but that it was blended with an identical act belonging to *dichetal do chennaib* and traceable to a belief in the magic power of the hand.

In conformity with each of these explanations, it appears that there was extant in very ancient times an Irish story according to which Finn burned his finger on a cooking salmon and thereafter, when he put his finger into his mouth, became possessed of the divining power. This story further appears to have been the basis of the tales in later Irish and Scottish tradition.

The episode of Finn and the cooking salmon found in the *Macgnímartha Finn* seems to be, as has been indicated above, merely a literary rendering of this primary tale mentioned in the preceding paragraph. The apparent inconsistency in this version due to the fact that, although Finn had eaten the salmon, he was still obliged to put his thumb into his mouth to awaken his divining power,[13] may be explained on the ground that the author (or authors) of the literary version knew not only the story of Finn and the burned finger but also the tradition that the eating of the magic salmon insured poetic inspiration, and that he (or they) blended the two tales, as well as allusions to the rites of the *fili,* in the learned composition.

Any attempt to fix responsibility for the association of *teinm laida, imbas forosna,* and *dichetal do chennaib,*

[13] See Chapter II, note 7, and text, *supra.* See also Chapter VI, note 54, and text.

as well as other matters relating to poets and poetry, with the story of the burned finger and the salmon of knowledge appears futile. If the tradition of the inspiring finger had its origin in *dichetal do chennaib* and this act grew out of a belief in magic power of the hand, then matters relating to divination, to poetry, and to the magic practices may have been connected from the very first with the tradition of the inspiring finger and, consequently, with the story of the cooking salmon at the time of its origin. If the tradition of the inspiring finger was an evolution, later termed *dichetal do chennaib,* from beliefs concerning eating the flesh or drinking the blood of certain animals, then it appears probable that the association of the inspiring finger with matters pertaining to poetry and to the other incantations is traceable to the sacred fish and, likewise, belonged to the incident of the magic finger from the time of its invention. Or, if there was a confusion of *dichetal do chennaib,* originating in supernatural powers attributed to the hand, with Finn's inspiring finger, arising in the tradition relative to eating the flesh or drinking the blood of certain animals, then the association of the finger with the three magic practices and the art of poetry might be attributed to either of the different sources. It would be difficult to determine the form of the episode of the salmon of knowledge when it reached the composer of the *Macgnímartha Finn.* Whether he or some earlier redactor was responsible for the episode in its present form, it seems probable that the *motif* concerning Finn's *eating* of the salmon was an interpolation by some editor who worked over the story of the cooking salmon and the

burned finger and blended the two *motifs*. It furthermore appears not improbable that the composer of the episode in its present form knew that the magic finger, or the salmon, or both of these details were in some way connected with poetic inspiration and the magic rites of the *fili*, and, because of this knowledge, he introduced, on his own initiative, the words regarding singing through *teinm laida*, as well as the allusions to *imbas forosna*, *teinm laida*, and *dichetal do chennaib*.

The story of Finn's burned finger and the cooking salmon as preserved in Irish oral tradition appears to be a practically uncontaminated survival of the primary tradition concerning Finn's burning his finger on the cooking salmon, the possible origin of which has been discussed in preceding paragraphs. The modern Irish tale of Finn and the cooking salmon is simple, logical, and complete; and, as might be expected, the composer seems to have had no knowledge of a relationship between the inspiring thumb and any one of the magic practices belonging to the ancient Irish poet.

The account of Finn and the cooking salmon preserved in Scottish oral tradition apparently has as its basis the primary story of Finn and the cooking salmon, discussed above. This primary story, which, in all probability, knew nothing of the tooth of knowledge, seems to have been adapted to fit the tradition that Finn inserted his finger under his "knowledge tooth," the probable origin and development of which tradition has been considered above in connexion with the story "Finn and the Phantoms." According to this modern Scottish version, Finn burned his finger on the cooking salmon, thrust his finger into his mouth, thus "discov-

ered" his "knowledge tooth," and ever afterward had foreknowledge when he pressed this tooth with his finger. As in the story "Finn and the Phantoms," Finn's magic power lies in the "tooth of knowledge"; but under such circumstances it should be unnecessary to insert the finger in the mouth, even to press the "knowledge tooth," and the whole tradition as it stands is made illogical. This inconsistency strengthens the probability, indicated above, that the entire tradition of the "tooth of knowledge" resulted from a pre-tenth-century blending of a tradition dealing with a magic tooth into a legend which concerned a magic finger or thumb. It will be noted that neither the supernatural fish nor the inspiring finger plays a part in this story; that the burning of the finger is used only as a device to bring about the discovery of the wonderful tooth; and that the narrative fails to explain why Finn was ever afterward obliged to put his finger into his mouth and press his tooth with it whenever he wished to make use of his divining power. On the whole, it appears not improbable that the composer of this story knew the tradition of the "tooth of knowledge," which had originally told only of a magic finger, but in which had been inserted a story concerning a tooth that had taken over the magic properties belonging to the finger. He also knew something of a legend of a "salmon of knowledge" which purported to explain the origin of the magic thumb or finger. These two bits of lore were more or less illogically blended to form a tale relating to Finn's *discovery* of his "tooth of knowledge." This curious story, it may be noted, makes no allusion to *teinm laida* or to any of the other magic practices belonging to the poet.

Among the methods appearing in modern Irish tradition through which Finn awakened his divining power, perhaps the most common is that which limits the operation to his putting his thumb (1) into his mouth or (2) under his "knowledge tooth." These traditions are obviously survivals of ancient legends of an identical nature, the former having its ultimate origin in the primary tale of Finn's magic thumb or finger, the latter in the tradition relating to Finn's insertion of his finger under his "knowledge tooth" as it appears in the story "Finn and the Phantoms." Irish oral tradition frequently represents Finn as chewing his thumb "from the flesh to the bone, from the bone to the marrow," etc.;[13] and this is evidently a modern elaboration of either of the processes mentioned above, though one is tempted to conjecture that it has developed from the tradition of the insertion of the finger or thumb under the knowledge tooth. Another curious modern evolution of Finn's divining operation appears in the story entitled *Toruigheacht Dhiarmuda agus Ghrainne,*[14] which states that Finn called for a chess-board and some water, and, having washed his hands, put his thumb under his "knowledge tooth." The latter part of this operation is evidently the inciting process preserved in the *Acallam na Senórach,*[15] but the chess-board presents a new element. In very ancient times, the chess-board, according to Irish tradition, was a highly valued possession and may have been accorded a magic significance. In any event, it seems not illogi-

[13] See Chapter II, note 38, and text, *supra.*

[14] Edited and translated by O'Grady, *OS,* III (1855), 181, and note. For data concerning manuscripts, see *ibid.,* pp. 30 ff.

[15] See note 11, and text, *supra.*

cal that an article of such importance should have been blended into a legend which exhibited magic phenomena.[16] The divining operation most commonly attributed to Finn in Scottish oral tradition is the insertion of his finger under his knowledge tooth; and this, together with similar statements in modern Irish lore, is apparently a survival of the ancient method which appears in "Finn and the Phantoms." The two Irish stories relating to Finn's power of divination which occur in the *Feis Tighe Chonain Chinn-Shleibhe* are evidently modern developments growing out of the tradition that he possessed such power.[17] No allusion to a magic tooth, thumb, or finger appears in either of them, and Finn's divining power is attributed to the fact that he drank water which had come from a magic well.

That the conclusions and explanations set forth in the foregoing pages must be highly conjectural appears immediately when one examines closely the nature of the evidence at hand. It would be difficult to determine in what preceding forms the extant stories may have existed or to decide to what extent and from what causes they may have been modified and garbled; but we have presented in the course of our study those tentative conclusions and explanations which seem to be most logically suggested on the basis of the evidence available. These may be restated as follows:

[16] Concerning the chess-board in early Irish tradition, see O'Curry, *Manners and Customs,* I (1873), ccci, dcxlii; II (1873), 192; III (1873), 165. Cf. Joyce, *A Social History of Ancient Ireland,* I (1903), 65, 441; II (1903), 49, 68, 477 ff.; O'Grady, *loc. cit.*

[17] See Chapter II, note 35, *supra.*

(1) The tradition of Finn's inspiring finger seems to be traceable to *dichetal do chennaib,* which, in turn, had its origin in beliefs concerning the magic power of the human hand. Before the end of the tenth century, confusion concerning these practices was such that the name *teinm laida, imbas forosna,* or *dichetal do chennaib* might well have been used to designate any one of the rites, and learned scribes applied any of the names to Finn's act. Furthermore, Finn's act became separated from the name of any incantation, and stories were invented or adapted to explain it.

(2) An extremely simple way to account for the magic finger would be through its insertion in a fairy-knoll, and, with Finn's amorous tendencies, the story of his pursuit of a fairy woman, the smashing of the finger, etc., suggested itself. But there was also a tale relating to Finn's killing of Cúldub, and into this some redactor blended the detail of the smashed finger, a borrowing from the legend of Finn and the fairy woman.

(3) The idea of the "tooth of wisdom" appears to have been evolved from a misunderstanding of the *motif* regarding Finn's inspiring finger. The tradition relating to Finn's insertion of his magic finger in his mouth being extant, some author, knowing a scrap of magic lore concerning a tooth, incorporated it in the story, using it wrongly, however, as the source of the magic power, and developed such a *motif* as that preserved in "Finn and the Phantoms." This *motif* is apparently the source of the similar tales found in Irish and Scottish oral tradition.

(4) The legend of Finn and the cooking salmon apparently resulted from the blending of two traditions. Based on the primitive notion

that eating the flesh or drinking the blood of certain animals gave supernatural powers, a tradition was extant in Ireland that eating a sacred salmon insured the attributes of a *fili,* viz., poetic inspiration and the divining power. Some author seems to have accounted for the tradition of Finn's inspiring finger, traceable to *dichetal do chennaib,* by a tale according to which Finn's finger was burned on the magic fish.

(5) Since, except in the *Fáfnismál* and related tales, there is nothing in the Sigurd-saga even remotely resembling the cooking heart and the insertion of a finger in the mouth, and since there appears to be no similar *motif* in Continental tradition, it seems relatively certain that the incident of Sigurd and the burned finger in the *Fáfnismál* may be attributed to an Irish source.

(6) Episodes in the stories of Taliesin, Fear-achur Leigh, Gilleadha, Michael Scott, and Sir James Ramsay appear likewise to have been made in imitation of the legend of Finn; and, for the most part, the other stories in Irish and Scottish tradition which concern Finn's divining power, although modified and embellished in certain cases with unrelated bits of magic lore, seem to be developments from the basic tales mentioned above.

Such seem to have been the origin and development of the curious cycle of stories and traditions relating to Finn and his miraculous power. Living to the present day in the recited tales of Celtic peoples, these stories are probably developments from legends which have their roots in pre-Christian, if not in pre-Celtic, times. The pagan incantations *imbas forosna* and *dichetal do chennaib* are undoubtedly of very great antiquity and are apparently traceable to a magic belief

growing out of a sacred significance attached to the human hand. The associated pagan incantation *teinm laida,* evidently a form of rhabdomancy, appears to be an Irish representative of a very widely distributed belief which may have had its origin in a cult of sacred trees. The magic hazel may apparently be traced to the same source, while the sacred or magic salmon is possibly suggestive of totemism. Evidence which throws any light on the source of the tooth in the tradition of the "tooth of knowledge" is decidedly meager, although, as has been indicated above, the magic tooth may be the outgrowth of a confused notion respecting the inciting operation of *dichetal do chennaib.*[18] The idea of rebirth as evidenced in the stories of Amairgen, Mongan, and Tuan mac Cairill, as well as in the *Kat Godeu* and related Welsh tales, may, as Nutt suggested, have its origin in an early Celtic doctrine of metempsychosis, although it appears more likely that the idea is merely a feature such as is found in the fantastic lore of all peoples.

An attempt to distinguish among these ancient beliefs such as are Celtic from those which have their origins in a pre-Celtic population of Ireland seems extremely hazardous. Plummer, however, in his *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* makes the following statement:[19]

[18] It has been asserted that the term "wisdom tooth," as applied to the third molar, is to be explained by the fact that this tooth usually appears when a person is arriving at years of discretion. On the basis of the well-known tradition relating to the magic "tooth of wisdom" in Irish and Scottish lore, one is tempted to wonder whether the name "wisdom tooth" for the third molar may not be traceable to a Celtic source. Concerning the "wisdom tooth," see *A New English Dictionary,* Oxford, X, ii (1928), *s.v.* "Wisdom tooth."

[19] I (1910), cxxxiii.

"Celtic heathenism seems to have consisted of two main elements; a system of nature worship with departmental gods, of whom the sun and fire god was the chief; and a system of magic or druidism. Of these the former was a development of the religion which the Celts brought with them from the original home of the Aryans, wherever that may have been; the latter was the religion of the pre-Aryans whom they found occupying the lands which they invaded, and whom they largely absorbed. The literature shows that the latter element was the more permanent. Indeed in a sense it may be said never to have died out. It appears plainly and directly in the legends both secular and ecclesiastical. The Christian teachers never took the line of denying the reality of its existence. It was gentile or diabolic knowledge, powerfully ranged against themselves. But the other element is a matter of inference. Its direct exposition was made impossible by the acceptance of Christianity. The impact of the stronger creed shattered it into fragments; but many of the fragments floated down the stream of time, and recombined in fantastic shapes around the persons of pagan heroes and Christian saints, who are not therefore necessarily non-existent or non-historical because they have formed the nucleus round which mythological elements have gathered."

Fragments from the latter of these two elements apparently contributed in large measure to the matter from which this cycle of stories concerning the celebrated Finn was evolved.

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